

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

| <u>Year: 1964</u> | <u>SERMON TITLE</u>                                          | <u>TEXT</u>       |
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| March 8           | "What A World"                                               | John 3: 16        |
| March 15          | "Of The Same Opinion Still"                                  | John 8: 46-59     |
| March 22          | "A Time For Decision"                                        | Luke 19: 41-42    |
| March 29          | "At The Sound Of A Woman's Name"                             |                   |
| April 5           | "That You May Believe"                                       | John 20: 30-31    |
| April 12          | "Good Shepherd"                                              | John 10: 11       |
| April 19          | "The Dishonest Steward"                                      | Luke              |
| April 26          | "Parable Of The Talents"                                     | Luke 19: 11-26    |
| May 3             | "To Build A Tower"                                           | Luke 14: 25-33    |
| May 10            | "When Is A Home Christian?"                                  | I Peter 3: 8      |
| May 17            | "The Mighty Works Of God"                                    | Acts 2: 11        |
| May 31            | "Rich Man, Poor Man"                                         | Luke 16: 19-20    |
| June 7            | "The Banquet-Giver"                                          | Luke 14: 15-16    |
| June 28           | "Elder Son"                                                  | Luke 15: 25       |
| July 12           | "The Two Faces Of Christ"                                    | Mark 8: 2 and 5   |
| August 30         | "The Father Had Two Sons" or<br>"The Prodigal Had A Brother" | Luke 15: 11       |
| September 6       | "A Most Disabling Sin"                                       | Matthew 6: 25     |
| September 13      | "In Every Pang That Rends The Heart"                         | Luke 7: 13        |
| September 20      | "Who Humbles Himself"                                        | Luke 14: 11       |
| September 27      | "To Be Truly Religious"                                      | Matthew 22: 37-40 |

1964- continuedSERMON TITLET TEXT

|             |                                        |                 |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------|
| October 11  | "God's Invitation To Joy"              | Matthew 22: 1-2 |
| October 18  | "The World Was His Parish"             | Luke 10: 1      |
| October 25  | "The Truth That Frees"                 | John 8: 32      |
| November 1  | "The Blessed"                          | Matthew 5: 1-3  |
| November 8  | "If Goodness Lead Him Not -"           | Matthew 9: 18   |
| November 15 | "To Which The Whole Creation<br>Moves" | Matthew 24: 27  |
| November 22 | "Too Late!"                            | Matthew 25: 12  |
| November 29 | "The Fifteenth Year"                   | Luke 3: 1-2     |
| December 6  | "In The Shadow Of Eternity"            | Luke 21: 27     |
| December 13 | "Answer, Please"                       | Matthew 11: 3   |
| December 20 | "Christ's Finger Post"                 | John 1: 23      |
| December 27 | "Christianity's Final Argument"        | John 21: 24     |

"WHAT A WORLD!"  
(John 3:16)

A You may have many words for Asia. Let me suggest one now: it's "the land of the burden-bearer" - - everyone seems to be carrying something. Not an uncommon sight is the man with the shoulder-bar, suspended on either side is the rope around whatever it is he may be carrying. Sometimes the object is covered. There's an old proverb in Asia. It goes like this: Only the man who carries it knows how heavy it is.

b In such the same spirit I return to this pulpit today, telling you that only the person who has been where I have been, only the person who has seen what I have seen, only the person who has experienced what I have experienced, knows what I mean when I say - - it's good to be back. I would be less than truthful if I were not to tell you that there were moments when I thought that I might not return. I am grateful for your prayers. And all of this leads to nothing less than re-commitment to Christ and the work that remains for us to do together.

c The sermon bears the title "What A World" - - and the text, the familiar verses, John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Whatever you do, don't be misled by the sermon title. You may think for the moment that I've come here to talk about the world---to talk about the world at the expense of talking about God. But the theme of themes in this sermon is God. The text, therefore, is far more important than the title. God loves the

world. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that man should not perish, but that man should live forever. Maybe my enthusiasm was carrying me away when half a world away and weeks ago I wrote the church office and suggested that when the copy for this week's MESSENGER should be prepared, that's the way the sermon title should be listed - - "What A World!" - - because I was very much conscious of the world. I was in a strange part of the world. I was in the part of the world where most of the people live. Two-thirds of the people live in Asia, and I was surrounded by all of these people. I saw strange things.....I smelled strange things.....I heard strange things. And like as not, all that I could say again and again - - "what a world!" - - - "what a world!"

Ah, not just because it was different! You know very well that each of us runs the risk of becoming terribly, terribly provincial. Most of us, day by day, run about in the same little circle. We come back to the same house, we go to the same place where we work, we take the bus and see the same faces.....we can become very provincial, and think in terms of only what is immediate to us. No wonder that man in New York State, an editor of a small newspaper in a small town, listed the eclipse of the sun under local news! This is typical of many of us.

But then, for these two months, you see, I was taken out of what was provincial. I went out there to that far part of the world, to the world that's way out there, and up to this moment for me had been nothing but stretches on a map. So I was there. Now the assignment has been completed. The mission has been accomplished. I think of the itinerary - - it reads, of course it does, as a schedule for an airline.....Washington....New York....Beirut....Jerusalem.....Cairo....Bombay....Madras...six weeks in Andhra Pradesh....then Delhi....then



that most fascinating of all places, Kathmandu, in the little kingdom of Nepal...  
.....than Calcutta....Hong Kong....Tokyo.....six hours from Tokyo, the Far  
East, to Anchorage, our Far West.

A Now that I am back, I freely confess I have extreme difficulty in finding  
myself. I still feel a bit bewildered. I rationalize---I say it's the time dif-  
ferential. I am still getting up, wide awake, at two o'clock. I have been as  
wide awake as I am right now since two o'clock this morning. I still can't get  
the adjustment of the nights and the days of the time differential. And so I  
say, I'm a bit bewildered. And then I blame it on that lingering pesky virus  
infection, and I say maybe this is why I'm without that spring in my step that  
I want so much.

b But then in a more somber moment I say these are not the reasons. I lack  
that spring in my step which I want so much, which will return - - I lack it  
for the simple reason that I'm still being haunted by what I saw, by what I felt.  
o No man can go where I have gone and see what I have seen, with a sensitive heart,  
and remain unmoved. That's why, time and again, I have no other word for it ex-  
cept this - - "what a world!" - - "what a world!"

C The other half is so different.

To begin with, it's not nearly as clean as this half. The other half is  
terribly dirty. Filth, squalor - - everywhere. Even the sacred rivers are cess-  
pools, in which people have a cleansing act, in which people relieve themselves,  
physically, in which they do their laundry, in which they brush their teeth.

What a world!

It's a filthy world! It's a dirty world.

What a world!

It's a heavily populated world. People.....people. Talk about a population

A  
B  
O explosion.....Hong Kong---a most fascinating place---a San Francisco with a hundred more charms!.....thanks to the refugee problem, for every adult who dies there are six children born. People...people....everywhere - - - the teeming mass of humanity. They descended upon Hong Kong when they fled from Red China. They looked for a place to sleep, a place to lie down, a little corner they could call their own where they could rest. You'll find them on the hillside, in squatters' huts, and you'll find the same squatters' huts atop the apartment buildings, the office buildings in Hong Kong - - - 30,000 of them by latest count, took the open stairway in the apartment building and went uninterrupted to the top of the building and there they squatted. You'll find little colonies of them floating in the rivers, in a little bit of a boat with a covering over it, and there they eat and there they sleep and there they die, and there their children are born. By the time we got to Hong Kong we were free from the intense heat of India. The temperature was mild. There wasn't the stench from the river. There wasn't the stench from the bay. But in a week or two, a month or two, there will be. That's the way they live.

C The government is trying to do something about it, this mass population, this teeming mass of humanity. They have a housing authority; they're building apartment houses. First glimpse of them, you say they're attractive. You could build one on the site of Saint Luke Church. It's an H-shaped structure, seven stories high. Each apartment consists of one room - - one room, 9 x 12 - - a bare room. And the only people who can get in that, so great must be the rationing of space, is the family that has at least five---five adults. Two children count as one adult. You can figure it out for yourself, if there's a father and a mother, how many other people there could be.

Two or three thousand people live in the apartment house that you could build on the site of Saint Luke Church. It's in the H part of the structure, the

bar, where the latrine and the water facility is. One - - let me say it again - - a single, a solitary water tap, for the entire floor. They may do the cooking on a little charcoal, the little habachi in their room--this room of 9 x 12 - - or they may go out on the little balcony part, it's about 30 inches wide. In one of the more than three hundred pictures that I've taken I have a picture of a woman preparing a meal, cleaning, plucking a chicken right outside her door.

A What a world!

A heavily populated world. A filthy world. A miserable world!

Red China, they say, has six hundred million people.

India - - four hundred and fifty million people....where the life expectancy is about thirty-eight years of age....where half the people of India are less than eighteen years of age. My word for India is Poverty Unlimited. Hopeless is a word that ought not to be in the vocabulary of the Christian, but it kept bobbing back and forth on my tongue when I was in India. I hardly knew where I would begin if I were in a position to do anything about it...

....for the average person in India lives on twenty cents a day

....where for any number of people had is wherever you happen to make it

....where perhaps the only thing that you own is what you happen to have

on your back - - and that could be something less than a loin-cloth at that

It's a miserable world, way out there.....Poverty Unlimited.....

.....filth.....squalor.

It's a superstitious world.

India is a religious people. They have their temples, their shrines, their sacred rivers, their sacred cows, their sacred food. They kill no living thing,

so great is their superstition, so great is their religious belief. They have their temples. They go to worship....

...there's a big bell, with a mighty cord that comes down, and you ring the bell - - not because you're there to give praise to the god whom you're going to adore - - - you ring the bell because you want to waken your god up! He's a god who is given to sleeping. You want him to pay attention to you, and you want him to hear your prayer, and you want him to know you're there, so you ring a bell.

It's a land of fear and superstition.

Not far from where I was staying they told me is the Hindu shrine in which they keep a sacred cobra - - they call the cobra the re-incarnation of a certain person....and they come there, they make their prayers....this cobra makes their god real to them. What kind of god?

We went to another shrine. We saw the devotees. They were praying.

How were they praying?

They were simply circling the shrine, turning the prayer wheels, a whole series of prayer wheels, and inside each prayer wheel, a series of printed prayers - - - it's prayer by automation, you see - - - you simply go around the shrine, give each prayer wheel a twirl, and your prayers go up to heaven - just like that!

They have their gods. They have their shrines.

...and on some of their gods at certain times of the year they'll pour honey - - smear the lips of the god with honey, because they want the god to say nice things to them, they want the god to say good things to them.

I can still see their houses. They have decorations on the outside at the turn of the year. They're there....to frighten the evil spirit away. Sometimes when they build their houses, they never put one door opposite another door, be-

cause, they say, if this evil spirit comes in one door, that he can easily get out the other door directly opposite, so therefore they move the door on the opposite side to another location, so that when the evil spirit comes in, head-on, he'll bang his head against the opposite wall and he'll die...and you get rid of the evil spirit.

In some of the houses that they build, people fortunate enough to have houses, - - we saw it in the palace of the Ranas(?) - - we thought that they were ventilators in the ceiling; but they were openings, grills in the ceiling, that they might let out the evil spirit.

We went to a wood-carver's. He had a miserable hovel. But it had three floors. He lived on the top floor, because he wanted to get away from the evil spirits. The higher up he goes, the farther away he gets from the source of evil.

It's a superstitious world.

It's a hungry world. Two-thirds of the people live in Asia - - most of them go to bed at night hungry. They never, never have enough to eat.

It's a bad world.....there's hate...there's envy...there's jealousy.

...India is the land of the villages. She does have four big cities.

- -in one of her big cities alone she numbers seventy thousand prostitutes.

It's a dirty world. It's a miserable world. It's a hungry world.

It's a big world. It has many people. It's a world of fear and superstition.

But the text says God loves it.

God, how could you?

...this is the torment of soul I have - -

God, how could you love a world like that?

...I'm honest enough to tell you that I've asked myself  
that question - -



God, how can you love a world as dirty as this?

God, how can you love a world with so great misery?

God, how can you love a world that has so much superstition?

God, how can you love a world that either ignores you, or when they do know something about you, defy you and disobey you?

A The text says God loves the world. And you can't separate God from His world, and you can't separate the world from God. When we Christians talk about the world we have to talk about God. When we talk about God we have to talk about the world. And when we do, we have to remember the relationship that God has to it - - that it's one of love - -

b ....miserable, superstitious, filthy, bad.....but God loves it. And God loves it just because He happens to be God. God doesn't love it just because we're attractive to Him. God loves it because it's His nature to love.

o God, how could you love the world?

...I ask myself the question - - and then quickly I say to myself - - "but I know You do."

c I haven't been preaching the Christian Gospel all these years for nothing. I know that God loves me. And I know that God loves you. Not just because you're from the West. Not just because you have a clean face and you use soap. Ah, no! - - you and I just happen to be sinners with clean faces, that's all. They happen to be sinners with dirty faces. The Bible says God loves the world - - the clean ones and the dirty ones....the miserable ones....and those who are trying to be good.

How do I know?

Because I know that I'm redeemed by God's grace. And I found people who are living in the light of God's love. To the last day that I serve as your

Pastor chances are you'll get the echo and the re-echo of what I'm telling you now - - "what a world!"

It's a world that God loves.

And I name one person that I found to prove it - - oh, I found many others, but she's the one who comes to my mind quickest. She's a Pennsylvanian, and her name is Hilda Kircher. She made up her mind to go to India as a missionary..she's not far from retiring. I think she's the most Christ-like woman I've found in India. She separated herself from the regular missionaries. She got herself a little house on the outskirts of a village. She doesn't live there alone - no! She has a couple of one-time prostitutes living with her. She has the scum of humanity living with her. She has the abandoned, the deserted woman and her child living with her. She even has a leper living with her. She completely identifies herself with them - - in their need.

God loves the world. How do I know? I met her. She's proving it. She is as Jesus Christ to the world.

Let me tell you something perfectly wonderful....a police officer who knows her, and a police officer who knows the village, said that the day she moves away from that village half the people will move away, because they can't think of living in that community without her stabilizing influence. All hell might let loose when she's no longer there.

What a world!

It's a world that God loves.

It may take me a while, now, until I get that spring back in my step. These mental images haunt me. I know very well that as I speak to you, you can't possibly appreciate it unless you've been there. But it is there. And God knows it. God loves it. Maybe you won't be packing your bags and going....



...but every time you come to church you're going to go there, because in church, if we don't do it at any other time, we're going to lift our eyes beyond our own horizons....and we pray for the missionaries, and we pray for the cause of Jesus Christ in all parts of the world.

And I want you to know that you have a vested interest in that part of the world now. There's going to be established over there "The Village of The Grateful Leper" - - a little colony where the hopeless of humanity will come and find shelter and love, and a little bit of hope. And all that's possible because God is loving them through you...

...I think I feel the spring in my step coming back.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 15, 1964

"OF THE SAME OPINION STILL"  
(John 8:46-59)

C The sermon is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. It bears the title "Of The Same Opinion Still." The text, it's the 59th verse of the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Then took they up stones to cast at him:  
but Jesus hid himself, and went out of  
the temple, going through the midst of  
them, and so passed by."

O Enroute to India we were fortunate in being able to stop again in the Holy Land. And when one visits the Holy Land he does well to remind himself that here, perhaps, as no other place on earth, he can appreciate the humanity of Jesus, that is, he can recognize the validity of the historical Christ. For it's the wise pilgrim who morning after morning, as he goes out to visit sacred sites, will say to himself: today I shall walk where Jesus walked...it was beneath Judean skies that He slept...it was here on these hills that He walked. So with whatever sensitivity God would allow me, I went hither and yon in the Bible land that they call the Holy Land.

Y And without too much difficulty I could picture Jesus Christ. I remember how when I first went to Nazareth it seemed everywhere that I looked I saw boys, and I said to myself, Nazareth is a boys' town - - and how well it should be a boys' town, because this is where Jesus grew up as a boy. And I saw those young men, those dark-skinned lads, running hither and yon, now perhaps scaling the mountain-top, perhaps with a little bit of a lunch that his mother had given him; and then from the top of the mountain, looking down into the valley, seeing the caravan in the distance, and who knows, perhaps

the boats in the harbor. And I dare say to myself, that's the way it was when Jesus was here. And I could appreciate His humanity....

...I think I could hear Him laugh

...I think I heard Him sing

....I think I felt the pain when He stubbed His toe, when  
He was running inadvertantly and stumbled

...I think I felt the hunger pangs when He came in in  
mid-afternoon, hoping that Mary would have for Him  
a crust of bread

...I think I felt His anguish of heart when He knew that  
people would not always believe Him

.....and dare I make bold to say that I felt the  
crown of thorns upon His brow when I sat  
there in the shadow of Calvary?

Now there are many aspects of the humanity of Jesus Christ that I can appreciate. I can think of Him as the weeping Christ...I can think of Him as the laughing Christ....I can think of Him as the bleeding Christ....I can think of Him as the tired Christ....I can think of Him as the Christ who was hungry and thirsty.

But when I come to this Gospel lesson for the day, there is an aspect of humanity that I do not easily appreciate. For there are very few chapters in the Bible quite like this 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John---for it introduces me to a picture of Jesus Christ for which I have little enthusiasm. But it's an aspect of humanity. Here in this 8th chapter of the Gospel according to John you have the arguing Christ....a Christ that permitted Himself to be dragged into an argument....a Christ who allowed Himself to become

so involved that He had to suffer and to endure these pygmy of souls, these stubborn men who strutted their stuff in front of Him and proudly and vigorously threw one contention after another in His face. And then Jesus, patient and deliberately, answered their arguments.

I do not easily accept the arguing Christ. It is with some difficulty that I read this chapter from beginning to end, for verse after verse, one argument after another, and Jesus in the thick of it! Maybe it's because I've lost my enthusiasm for argument. In the impressionable days of high school I delighted in being a member of the debating team, and it followed me through my first year in college. But then I had done with it...and I tried to answer myself "why?"

Well, I've engaged too many people who delight in arguing just for the sake of arguing. And I don't know that there is much to be said for mental gymnastics of this kind, just to argue for the sake of it. Life is far too serious to spend time needling, and trying to bolster up your own point of view, whether you believe in it or not, just for the sake of argument.

And then I think I've lost my enthusiasm for it because somehow I'm inclined to think that the validity of a person, or the validity of an issue, ought to be recognized immediately for face value, for what it is. If a man has to be convinced of something that's basically sound, well I don't know that I want to waste my time with him. It should speak for itself! And something down deep inside that man should recognize it at once. Well, that's the way I try to analyze my own mind, when I can't bring too much enthusiasm for the concept of the arguing Christ.

But there's the 8th chapter of John. And you and I can't draw pictures of Jesus Christ to satisfy our own image of Him. You can't tamper with Scrip-

ture. Argue He did!

Ah, but I'll be honest with you on another score. I think there's another reason why I cannot have too much enthusiasm for this arguing Christ, for the simple reason that He lost the argument! Not that He didn't have the better of the points---God forbid that any of us should ever think that!.....but He didn't win the argument in this sense, that when He had finished speaking He was able to say--"I've persuaded them--they see it from My point of view." But to the contrary, my friend, the truth of the matter is this: that they were of the same opinion still - - only more so! And the argument ended this way---they reached for stones, and if they would have had their way, they'd have had done with Him then and there.

I suppose that's another reason--I can't conceive of a losing Christ. I want a Christ who wins everything, even when He engages me, little me, with all my stubborn resistance, and to be able to best me and have the better of the argument. I would much prefer to have the story go like this....

- - argue with Jesus, will you? well, go ahead!

He'll show you a thing or two! He'll meet you

at every point. He'll get the best of the

argument, and what is more, He'll get the best of you

...He'll win quite handily!

...that's the way I wish it would have happened...but it didn't.

I hesitate to say it, even Christ doesn't always chalk up a victory after each encounter. But why did He argue? Why did He permit Himself to get involved? Why did He stoop to our level? Why did He allow Himself so great humiliation, to the extent that He can say to them: "Which one of you convinces me of sin? Do you honestly believe that I'm in league with the devil?" - - - to think that God would permit Jesus Christ to be dragged to that level! Why did He do it?

knew full well when He argued with them that God is never to be found at the end of an argument.....but He could be found in the heart and the mind of the arguer. So He confronted them.

Then I think He may have argued with them for another reason: how many of them may have fallen in this category I don't know, but there are some of us who have our seasons of believing and seasons of doubt.

C I hope you know by this time, as long as I've walked with you and ministered to you, that God is very real to me. And I should earnestly hope and pray that every time I come to this sacred desk and conduct the service in the chancel, that if you know nothing else, you might know that here in this man God has become increasingly real.

O But I cannot say to you that God is always real to me. I cannot say to you that He comes to me always in the same degree of intensity, or rather I should say, my appreciation of Him is always the same degree of intensity.

P I once read about a woman who said, as she reviewed the last twenty years of her life, she said, with one sweep stroke of her hand - - "God has always been crystal clear to me!" When someone talks like that it almost takes my breath away, because I can hardly believe that it's possible that God should always be crystal clear.

Y I am a frail human creature, with all the limitations of the flesh, and my season of the spirit is like the days that I spent in Kathmandu....and there, surrounded by the tallest mountains in the world--I was told that they were there--it wasn't until I was there several days that I was able to see them, when the clouds lifted and the mist disappeared - - and then the next day the clouds and the mist came back again. So it is with my soul occasionally.....the vision can be cloudy, and God may not be as crystal clear as I once knew Him to be.



Let me think aloud in your presence. Let me tell you how, for my part at least, I'd finish this sermon. I think for one reason, He allowed Himself to argue with them because He believed that this is a risk that ought to be taken, that there are some people who are honest in their seeking, and who knows, even among them there might have been someone, at least, who was earnestly trying to apprehend and to better understand the mind of God....

C ..but in his bewilderment, he would raise one doubt after another. Maybe this is why Jesus allowed Himself to become involved in argument---for there are those who are the bewildered seekers after truth.

O You and I are prone to forget it, my friend, but it isn't possible for everyone to believe as easily as you and I believe. There are some for whom faith in God does not come easily. I can't remember when I did not believe. You and I were born, for the most part, with 'Bibles in our hands' - - we were part of the family circle where we learned to pray at a mother's knee, and always when Sunday morning came we clutched the hand of someone who led us in the direction of God's House. This is a situation in which many of us have always found ourselves.

P And perchance we've been blessed with a spiritual sensitivity that makes us easily say "I see! I see! I think I understand!" But this is not true for everyone. And you and I are in duty bound to recognize it.

Y There may be someone with whom you ride in the carpool tomorrow, who when he thinks of God, has constantly a question mark....there may be even someone within the confines of your own family circle who cannot accept so readily what you believe so easily.

Now God knows that there are those like this, and in their bewilderment, if they be sincere, perchance they must be encountered. And if it is in the pathway of argument, let it be in the pathway of argument. But Jesus Christ

Well maybe that's the way Jesus felt about some of these people. Maybe this was for some of these people a low day--a dark night of the soul. And when they brought to Him their doubt, they were to be argued with, not in spite of their doubt but because of their doubt, hoping that perhaps they could be brought back into believing - - - or the new kinship to which He alone could take them.

C Well, you see, I'm trying to be charitable.

O The tragedy is this: there were those who argued with Jesus Christ for the simple sake of argument and never had any intention whatsoever of believing. The argument was over. They were of the same opinion still. There are people like this.

P This is the tragedy of the human soul.....that heaven should be as near as this - - that a man should be confronted by God in Jesus Christ.....and there should be no willful intent on my part to believe, to accept.

Y This is the tragedy of life.....that heaven should be within a man's grasp, and he should refuse it, and in the refusal, go one step nearer to hell.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

March 22, 1964

"A TIME FOR DECISION"

The sermon on this Palm Sunday bears the title, "A Time For Decision"; and the text is from the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, portions of the 41st and the 42nd verses:

"And when he was come near, he beheld the city,  
and wept over it,  
Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at  
least in this thy day, the things which belong  
unto thy peace! - - "

C  
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Someone once characterized a former President of the United States in this way: right or wrong, that could be debated, but this much must be said, he was never indecisive. Confronted by a man, an issue or a principle, he knew, as the Chief Executive of the United States, that he would have to make a decision - - he could not be indecisive....and once he had decided, he knew it, his family knew it, his cabinet knew it, the people of the United States knew it - - the whole world, on more than one occasion, knew it. Right or wrong - - this could be debated, but this much must be said - - you could never call him indecisive.

That, my friend, is no small compliment to pay to any man.

Y  
Life has a way, you see, of constantly haunting us. There is always the time when a decision has to be made, and you and I have little respect for the type of person who goes through life forever skirting the issue, straddling the fence, talking out of both sides of his mouth at the same time..trying to carry water on both shoulders. Every now and then life forces the issue. We cannot evade it. The decision must be made.

So, now, you and I come to Palm Sunday. And that, precisely, was the Palm Sunday situation. Jesus Christ entered the Holy City. First of all, it was a

decision that He Himself had to make. He had been known as a prophet. For three years He had been proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Now there was a price upon His head. Would He publicly display Himself now, at the risk of being taken bodily? - and with the insight that becomes God Himself, He knew how that risk would end.

C  
O  
Jesus Christ could not be indecisive. That's one thing we can't permit our God. We must always know where He stands, we must always know what He thinks. And difficult as it may be for you and for me, we must always be sure what it is He expects from any one of us. We'll never permit our God to be indecisive. So Jesus Christ made up His mind. He would go to Jerusalem - - He would publicly display Himself. And in doing so, He would force the people to a time of decision.

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Y  
Now, let us look at this parenthetically for the moment. There are some people who when they understand the Palm Sunday situation say that Jesus was primarily dramatizing His role as a prophet. Now you can say this with some justification. Jesus was not the first prophet, albeit He is the greatest of the prophets. You can read in the Book of the Kings for yourself, in Jeremiah and in the Book of Ezekiel, how the prophets in those days, trying to get their message across, trying to communicate the people, trying to tell the Good Word, found that for one reason or another they just weren't getting through.....and then they resorted to this technique, this strategy, of dramatizing the truth, projecting themselves into the kind of situation where, when people saw them, they saw acted out for them the kind of thing for which they stood.

Well you can explain Palm Sunday in that way if you wish, and you won't be wrong, because Jesus had been proclaiming the Kingdom of God, Jesus had given all of His energy to establishing the fact that this world belongs to

God, the people belong to God, and that He as Christ had come to claim their hearts - - that they were right when they would think of Him as the Messiah - - they were right when they would think of Him as King above all kings and Lord above all lords and, how majestically we put it - - God above all gods.

Well we read the history, we know the record. For any one of a number of different reasons He wasn't getting through. Not because His trumpet (?) was uncertain---you can't say that about Jesus Christ!....but there was a certain kind of imperviousness, a certain degree of indifference on the part of the people---they had conditioned themselves to the ear, that when the truth would come they couldn't understand.

So now, and I think I can put it this way, time was running out. God had permitted Him only a limited number of years on this earth. Now there must be the final thrust. So He decides to dramatize His role. He will ride into the royal city. He will come as the princely come - - He will come as a lord, the Lord of Peace - - He will come as a king, the King of their hearts. So He came.

You can understand it that way. But you will do yourself a disservice, because this is not the whole story. You must recognize Jesus Christ now, coming to Jerusalem, forcing an issue - - - thrusting before people a time for decision. Now, there's a troublesome thought for you, God Himself takes the initiative.....God Himself puts Himself in a place where you cannot evade Him...the Hand of God that forces us to decide. That's a troublesome thought for some of us - -

....we'd much rather have a God who wouldn't get involved

....we'd much rather have a God who would let us take our  
good old time at solving these things

....but there comes a time and a season, I warn you, when God Himself will force the issue.

C  
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You see, that's what threw them off-guard in Jerusalem. Now He was there. As long as He was simply an itinerant preacher, up there somewhere in the hinterland of Galilee, they didn't have to talk too much about Him in Jerusalem. As long as you could keep Him talking at a village well, that was one thing...but to have Him ride down the main street of Jerusalem, the capital city - - that was another thing! As long as He was somewhere else, the waverers could continue to waver, and the indecisive ones could joy in their indecision....but now He comes to them, and He confronts them - - He's publicly on display. They will have to decide. That's the kind of Christ we have - - a Christ who can't be ignored, and a Christ who can't be evaded.

O  
His entrance into Jerusalem was the grand and glorious symbol of what was true for Him all His life. Wherever He went you had the element of confrontation.....

...there was Matthew at his office desk, gathering taxes, with all the opportunity in the world to defraud people, and who knows, he had made a killing many a day, because that's the kind of system of which he was part---he could do it! and he could get away with it, as far as they were concerned...

Y  
- - and then one day, there he looks up, and in front of him - - Jesus Christ....the moment of confrontation  
...and Matthew has to decide: he continues in the old way? -- or he tries the new one?

...it's as clear-cut as that.

...there was the man of the same occupation, Zachaeus...according to the tax system of that day, a man collected so much taxes--- he only had to return so much to Rome---and then he could take as much as the traffic would bear and pocket it for himself....



...Zacchaeus the despised and the rejected one.

- - the day Jesus came to Jericho they wouldn't even so much as give him standing room---he had to hide in the tree, if he wanted to see Jesus, and get away from the crowd itself--so great was their hostility to him....

- - and then this Jesus Christ called Zacchaeus by name, and they go and they have lunch together.....Zacchaeus can't evade it - - he can't ignore it....the time for decision is at hand: either he stays as he was -- or he tries the new?

...then one day, of all places, by a way-side well...a woman comes to draw water, and she sees the tired, weary traveler, and He begins talking to her.....and as He talks to the woman of Samaria He confronts her with the way she had mis-handled her sex life, the way she had permitted herself to become involved with any number of different men...He refuses to skirt the issue...He keeps talking to the point.....she had to decide: she either goes on as she was -- or she accepts the proffered new, and takes a venture with Christ.

You can catalog all these for yourself:....

.....Peter, the Big Fisherman.....a man named Saul--the moment of decision.

And now it came to Jerusalem.

When it came to Jerusalem there were the political leaders:

"He's an upstart - - He's a radical - - maybe he <sup>can't</sup> ~~could~~ be ignored - - he's forcing us to take a stand - - we will

oppose him - - we cannot afford to allow his preaching to  
prevail...think what would happen to us in our prestige,  
in our position - - ! "

...the business men, how He upset their carts in the temple, how He said:

"You dare not profiteer, you dare not bleed my people, you cannot grow  
rich at their expense, you cannot thrive in making them continually  
impoverished - "

...the business men said:

"What he says may be good religion, but it's poor for  
business!" ...so they decided the way they did - -

"We're not for you, Jesus. We have to think of ourselves!"

...how contemporary this is!

- - "We can't afford to decide for you, Jesus.

We have to think of ourselves."

...and then there were the religious leaders: let us get ourselves into  
the picture - -

Jesus came giving them a chance to decide---giving them a chance to decide for  
something fresh, something daring, for something divinely rash.

...they said No.

..."We can't afford to decide for you, Jesus.

What will happen to our traditions, the way  
we've always done things -- the way we can tie  
things into neat little packages and put them on  
a shelf!"

...please do not misunderstand me, I have the highest regard for the past...that's  
why I delight in history as much as I do, because one becomes enriched by calling

his heritage by name, but a man can't live in the past! He dare not become imprisoned by what has been -- it must be recognized only as the prelude of something yet more wonderful to come....

So Jesus Christ comes to them, and confronts them:

"Here I am. Now you must know for what I stand.

It's the time for decision."

C I think there are any number of things that Christ can't stand in you and in me....

O ...I can't conceive of His tolerating our dishonesty. I think sometimes the very first thing that Jesus Christ expects from you and me is that we be basically honest with Him -- honest to God and honest to ourselves.

P And then I think another thing that perhaps another thing that He can't stand very easily is our indecisiveness -- our wavering -- our refusal, our deliberate refusal, to make up our minds. But like it or not, God has a way of haunting us, God has a way of thrusting Himself upon us -- in a crisis -- you call it by name, whatever it may be....He's there.

So He came to Jerusalem.

Y The business men said No...we won't accept your way, Jesus Christ. ...and what happened? in the end they lost everything, for the city of Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed--laid level with the ground. Where, then, was their business?

The political leaders: No...we won't accept your way, Jesus Christ. ...and what happened? --to their dream for Judea? they were completely overrun, occupied...their kingdom was gone, and they never again regained it.

The religious leaders: in their refusal to decide for Jesus Christ...

...found within a comparatively short period of time  
the new religion was spreading to all the world, and  
they had nothing on their hands but the past...the  
future was no longer theirs.

C  
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And the average, common, every-day person, when he had a chance to  
decide---the man in the multitude: "If I have a choice, Jesus or  
Barabbas, it's safer to take Barabbas! Everybody knows what he is.  
But this Jesus Christ can be unpredictable, and that's too great a  
risk for me to take!....and this Jesus Christ could be far too de-  
manding, and I've grown too weary for venturing out and facing new  
frontiers - - "

You make a mistake, my friend, if you think Palm Sunday belongs to Jerusalem.  
It belongs to the main street of your own life. How He's going to come there,  
I don't know. When He'll come there, I don't know. But as the shepherd and  
Bishop of your souls let me tell you this: He will come. You're on His list.  
And He's so going to put Himself before you that you can't evade Him, you can't  
ignore Him. And that moment of decision can be your glory, or it can be your  
shame.

I'm fully aware that it's a risk that He's willing to take, a risk that  
could mean for Him humiliation. But He has to high a regard for human person-  
ality not to give us a chance. There's always the time for decision. Histori-  
cally it went like this:

"Hosanna" ..... "Crucify"

Crown ..... or a cross .....

Now human nature may change a great deal, but it hasn't changed in this re-  
gard, nor has God. He continues to confront us, and ours is the perilous thing  
called time for decision. You can decide the right way. May God have mercy if  
you don't.

"AT THE SOUND OF A WOMAN'S NAME"

The sermon on this Easter Day bears the title, "At The Sound of a Woman's Name" and the text is the 16th verse of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She  
turned herself, and saith unto him,  
Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

C  
O  
The stranger in those parts, his curiosity got the best of him when he discovered that as the people neared the door of the church they bowed their heads, the men doffed their hats, the women curtsied, always when they passed a particular spot in the wall by the church door. He observed it for several Sundays, and because he was by nature curious, he asked them why they did this where they did it. He recognized it, of course, as an act of devotion. None of them could explain to his satisfaction.

P  
Because he was as curious as he was, he felt there must be some particular reason why they would do it at this particular place. He could understand why they might genuflect, once they had entered the nave...but why outside? why in front of a blank wall? In due process of time he suggested that perhaps someone come and make investigation.

Y  
An equally curious professor from the University of Upsala was invited to come to Norway. So he made an investigation, and he found that beneath several coats of plaster there had been at one time a mosaic in this particular place in the wall, a mosaic of the Madonna and Child, and when it was first put there the people came with reverence, of course, and they had their act of devotion. Then when the wall was re-built, for one reason or another the Madonna was not restored - - they plastered over it. There was a second coat of plaster and a third. But year followed year, decade followed decade, and the

people continued the act of devotion. You see, it had become second nature, it had become a matter of pattern, a matter of habit.

I say to you this morning that our habits need to be re-examined. They need to be re-assessed. It could be that your coming to church on an Easter Day is something that you've done out of habit. It could be that your coming to church on any Sunday morning is something that you've done habitually.

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Now the strength of the church may lie in her good habits. I am not speaking disparagingly. We train those who are young, we introduce them to certain thoughts and to certain patterns, hoping and praying that as long as they live they will never forsake them. There's much to be said for the good habit. But it behooves every one of us, every now and then, to re-examine what he does habitually, that he might appreciate anew the meaning of the thing in itself. This could be true for us where Easter is involved.

Frederick Hamilton, a number of years ago, wrote a very interesting book. He was given to a backward look, and he thought he would like to put his finger upon things that were of the utmost importance in another age, and the book had the fascinating title: "All The Pomp of Yesteryear."

And one of the things that he includes in this book is an account of the Midnight Mass in St. Isaac Cathedral, in the city in Russia that was once known as St. Petersburg. He had a very vivid description of it...

...the people enter the cathedral by 11:30 on Easter Eve, and as they enter the church is in almost total darkness...but round about the entire interior of the church there were tens of thousands of unlighted candles - - the wick in each candle has already been dipped in kerosene, and each candle is connected to another candle by gun-cotton....and at the midnight hour the fortress cannons roar - - one torch is ignited, and instantaneously the cathedral



is ablaze of light!...there are the thunderous tones of the organ....the giant doors of the cathedral are swung open wide...choir after choir enters in procession, singing the glorious hymn of the Resurrection.....

C  
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We did that, only in degree, last evening, when we kept the Easter Eve Vigil here in Saint Luke Church. We too came to an almost totally darkened nave. We too tried to get the mood of what it was like if there had been nothing beyond Good Friday. Then as we recited the Creed there was the transition....it began slowly, as we began the Creed....."suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried - - " and then as we said "He arose from the dead, He sits on the right hand - - -".....this place, too, became radiant with light...there was the thunderous tone of our organ, there was the blare of the trumpets, there was the choir in procession.

There is much to be said for symbolism, there's much to be said for dramatizing a fact - - there's much to be said for a colorful interpretation. But I say to you this morning, every now and then we must re-assess, we must re-evaluate what we do colorfully, what we do dramatically, what we do symbolically, lest we lose the meaning of the thing we want to dramatize - - lest we lose the truth of the thing itself. And that's why I'm constrained to come to you on this Easter Day to tell you, the meaning of the real Easter is to be found as we remember how Easter actually occurred when it happened.

I consider myself fortunate - - twice I've gone to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. It's not far from the Damascus Gate, in a minute and a half you're at this narrow passage-way that leads into the Garden Tomb. There's no neon sign there announcing it, there's no one there in uniform urging you to enter. A simple unadorned sign that reads something like this: THE GARDEN TOMB - - COME - REST - PRAY. I was delighted to discover that once that dedicated

Swedish girl who was spending a year and a half studying the Bible in the Holy Land, as the keeper of the door, invited me in, and then she went away, with respect for my own act of devotion.

C I sat there alone. Spring was just beginning to come to Jerusalem. There was the promise of the bud in the tree above, and as I sat there I looked across the way to a limestone cliff. Years before someone had hewn from it a sepulchre. The door was open. Inside -- I don't remember the dimensions, perhaps 8x10, 10x12 -- you are invited to go into the place to see where they laid Him. Some people think this is the actual tomb which Joseph of Arimathea so thoughtfully gave to Jesus. Whether it's the actual tomb or not, surely it's one very much like the place where they put the body of our Lord.

O There was no trumpet, there was no choir, there was no organ, there was no altar.....I, a simple solitary soul -- confronted by an empty grave. And I said to myself, I must remind the people of Saint Luke Church when, God willing, I worship with them on Easter Day, that this is the way Easter occurred! It was the confrontation by Jesus Christ to the solitary soul, and at the sound of a woman's name -- (dare you put it this way?) -- at the sound of a woman's name Easter happened! For Mary was the first one to behold the resurrected Christ.

P Y It happened quietly, it happened naturally, it happened personally.

But if you and I are to appreciate this truth we must take another look at Mary Magdalene. Why, of all the people on the face of the earth, should Mary have been the blessed one to first behold the resurrected Christ? There are those who say, and I think I can honestly believe it myself, that of all people, no one except perhaps Mary, the mother of our Lord, loved Jesus Christ as much as Mary Magdalene. She was the one woman, aside from Mary, His mother, who loved Him most.

And you know the reason why. We like to think that she was forgiven most.

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She was the woman with a past. She was the play-thing in other men's hands. Then one day she met Jesus Christ....Jesus Christ always has a way of seeing us, not for what we are, but for what we were meant to become! -- and He loved her for what He could do for her. All other men, you see, and I hesitate to use the expression, loved her for what she could do for them. One day God's Great Galilean encountered Mary, and He loved her for what He could give her. This had never happened before -- to be on the receiving end -- to be able to lay hold upon the wholly undeserved, and to know that it was meant for you. When love comes like that it's never forgotten, it's forever cherished. If she is the one aside from His mother who loved Him most, I think I can believe it.

A poet, impressed by this truth, has written these lines, rather unusual, I dare say, but there's a beauty in them and surely a grace....

The Magdalene, at Michael's Gate,  
Chirled at the pin;  
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,  
"Let her in, let her in."  
"Hast thou not seen the wounds?" said Michael,  
"Knows't thou thy sin?"  
"It's evening, evening," said the blackbird,  
"Let her in, let her in."  
"Yes, I have seen the wounds, and I know my sin."  
"She knows it well, well, well," said the blackbird,  
"Let her in, let her in."  
"Thou bring'st no offering" said Michael,  
"Naught save sin."  
The blackbird sang, "She is sorry, sorry, sorry,  
"Let her in, let her in."  
When he had sung himself to sleep, night did begin,  
One came and opened Michael's Gate,  
And the Magdalene went in.

...that's what happened to her and Jesus Christ. No wonder she could not keep away. She had to run as soon as possible to the Garden Tomb. She was bewildered, she was confused -- she couldn't stay away from someone who had loved her so greatly. So she came.

And then, naturally, quietly, personally, it happened.....naturally.

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It happened to be this way because God was involved. Honestly now, the mystery is not the mystery of resurrection, because this is of the very nature of God - - for God is life and God is love and these are deathless. The thing that you and I could not understand would have been if it had not happened - - if someone like Jesus Christ would have come into the world and then you and I could have had the last word.....if Love so amazing, so divine, could give itself so sacrificially and then we take nails, we cause Him to bleed and to suffer death - - and it would all end there! -- this you and I could not understand, because God is involved and the very nature of God is life and love. It had to happen - - naturally.

It had to happen quietly...because God's preferred method is still the still small voice. God doesn't shout His way into your heart. God whispers. God speaks beseechingly, softly...

...in 1935 there were two men very busy at work.

The name of the one was upon the lips of tens of thousands of people, thousands upon thousands of people...no matter where you would have gone in Germany - -

"Heil Hitler!" "Heil Hitler!"

...and he talked in terms of a thousand years of his reign.

...over in Cambridge, England there was a man in his laboratory whose name was Fleming....no one was shouting his name, and there were no trumpets before him, but he was at work naturally and quietly - - the discoverer of penicillin -

...so God is always at work.

Then you must remember it happened person-to-person, this dialogue. But you may raise the question quickly: if that's the way it happened, why

didn't it happen immediately?...why did she stand there in her bewilderment, in her confusion?

C You're not forgetting, are you, that she was every bit as human as you and I. And because she was human she was overcome with her grief. She could not see Him because of her tears. It is a very human thing to cry, but man was not meant to cry forever. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning, because that's the way God made us. But she did have her moment of weeping - - her grief was that great on the human side.

O Then she was unable to see because she was looking in the wrong direction. She had her eyes focused upon the grave...she was constantly thinking of what man had done. And that's why you and I fail to see the hand of God, because the hand of man, cruel and vicious, commands attention when God is quietly working in some corner of His universe.

P The Easter message must always be one of relevance, it must be related to you and to me where we are. My friend, you could have sorrow, you could have frustration, you could have anguish, you could have disappointment, you could have disillusionment - - all of these things are the stuff of human fabric - - ...and you may be moved to human tears, you may be blinded by your tears, you may fail to see that God is within reach...you may not perceive that God is at work.

Y I beg you, turn from your grief toward Him...He is there...He is there. And then one day He'll call you by name. The message of Easter has no meaning for you whatsoever until you know that the resurrected Christ is calling you by name. What difference does it make to you until you believe that He said, "Because I live, you too shall live." - - ?

It happened quietly, naturally, and it happened personally. Dare I believe that it's happening now, for some of you right here in this place! Listen!!

- - - it's your name upon His lips!

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



April 5, 1964

"THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE"

The sermon for the day bears the title, "That You May Believe;" the text is from the Gospel for the day, the last two verses of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:  
But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

When we were students in Seminary the professor in preaching used to tell us that we ought to take a piece of paper, when we were preparing our sermon, and on this piece of paper at least three things ought to appear: the title or the theme for the sermon, then the text, and then most certainly this - - the aim....what do we hope to accomplish in this sermon that we are preparing, in the sermon that we plan to preach? It's a good rule for any preacher.

John had something like that in mind when he wrote his fourth Gospel, only he declares his aim at the end of his writing rather than at the beginning. There are those who honestly believe that this 20th chapter of the Gospel according to John is the way John ended his writing----that the 21st chapter was added later on. But after he had written his 20th chapter John ends in this fashion:

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:  
But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."



C John puts it very properly, and also politely. He's admitting that there were other things that Jesus did that he's not recording; but then he says, "I've recorded what I have with this one purpose in mind - - " Someone else, given to bluntness, might have said, "Oh, yes, there are a lot of other things that happened, but you don't need to know about them-- you just be content with what I'm going to tell you".....and he would have spoken just as truthfully as John spoke. John was given to politeness.

O The sad thing is, however, that no matter how properly he spoke, nor politely, in this day and age his words fall all too often upon deaf ears. And there are people who honestly believe that it doesn't make any difference what a man believes. They have no interest whatsoever in religious ideas - - their patron saint, if you want to call it that, could be the character in one of the novels of H. G. Wells. H. G. Wells has a man say, after he had succeeded very well in business...."Ideas? There are a lot of people trying to give me ideas. What are ideas? - - fanciful notions, that's what they are. They don't amount to anything. I succeeded in business because I had nothing to do with their ideas!"

Y Quite frankly, there are some people who feel the same way about religious ideas--we call them beliefs. They don't amount to anything - - in fact you can get along a lot better in life if you're not ham-strung by religious beliefs....

...let me have the freedom to run my own course...let me chart my own way....let me not be impeded by something that the church itself has formally declared is doctrine---that I must believe...

...well, there are people who think that way...

...and the saddest of all things that I might tell you in this sermon is this: their number seems to be increasing.

Stephen Neal was for thirty years the Bishop of the Anglican Church in south India. Not too long ago he paid a visit to America, and as a tourist and as a guest of our land he tried to catch something of the mood and of the temper of the West. He made it his business to read the most spoken-about newspapers, and he would always include the comic page, because he knew how important this was in the lives of some people...he made it his business to see the plays on Broadway, the ones most spoken about...he made it his business to listen and to view as many television dramas as possible. Then when he went back he recorded his observations.

It occurred to him, he said, that we in the West had bowed God out of the universe. In much that he had seen, in much that he had read, in much that he heard, God just did not figure. People did not so much as even give Him the time of the day! He was not brought into any of these things, or if He was brought in, maintained Stephen Neal, it was done sometimes in a satirical manner.

And then he had the very damning sentence - - it ought to make you as uncomfortable as it makes me - - he says there was a time when people thought about God, if only to argue about Him.....now there are many people who don't even argue about God. For them He's just non-existent.

John, the beloved disciple, says - -

I've written this book - - I've given you an image of Jesus Christ - - I've portrayed for you a profile, and I've done it deliberately, I have a purpose in mind....that once you are confronted by Jesus Christ, once you recognize it, that you might believe in Him, and that as you believe in Him

you might have life - -

...for John, beliefs do matter- - - they make all the difference in the world....and there are some of us who say the same thing.

John in all of his honesty says, - -

I want to give you a picture of Jesus Christ, but I want you to know at the very beginning that I'm not going to tell you everything about Jesus. There's a lot more to Him that I haven't told you, but what I have told you I've told you for this purpose - - -

...you who are inclined to be skeptical, if any among you would be cynical--- take heed to what John says - -

I admit that you're not being told everything about Jesus Christ.

In fact, John says, not all the books in all the world could tell the whole story!

In the Bible that's nearest my hand in my study there are, I think, 981 pages. Mark uses only 16 of those pages in that Bible to tell the story of Jesus Christ. Now you can't tell everything that occurred in 33 years in 16 pages about one man. Must I belabor the point any more? Nowhere in the Bible will you find whether Jesus weighed 162 pounds or 148 pounds....nowhere is it told us if He was 5 ft. 7 in. or 5 ft. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. We have reason to believe that He was dark-complexioned - - it's a safe assumption that His eyes were brown, dark brown. You won't find in the Bible anywhere a precise account of what He did every day - - how many miles He walked on Tuesday of the 28th year of His life. There is so much that you don't know....

...but, says John, the important thing is that you are given enough to believe - -

...and in the final analysis you and I must admit that life goes forward in

our every relationship, not only on the basis of what we know, but on the basis of what we believe.

C It would be foolhardy for me, every time I stand at this chancel step, looking at a man and a woman who are making promises to each other on the day of their wedding - - I do not say to him, "Tell me, John...."Tell me Harry... ...."Tell me, Richard - - - do you know for a fact that five years from today she will be true to you? - - - do you know for a fact that three years from today you will be in good health? ...you may not be in good health! - - " ....do I say to her, "Do you know that he will always come home to you? - do you know that he will always pay your every bill? - - do you know for a fact that he'll be as charming two years from now as he was last night? - - "

O ...it would be foolhardy for me to put any kind of question like this, for marriage, the precious thing that it is, is never built, essentially, upon what we know - - it's always built upon what we believe, believe in each other.....and even in the sacred institution of marriage itself, and what we believe about the God in whose name we make these promises to each other.... that's what life is built on, what we believe. Belief is always the basis for behaviour, and creed is always the cause for conduct.

Y The older I become, the more impressed I am with those who belittle this matter of belief. For all of life goes forward on the basis of what we believe...

...I believe that tomorrow will come, and therefore I order today accordingly

....in my own instance, I believe that God called me to be your Pastor - my every relationship with you is determined upon the basis of that belief.

Now John says, I want to give you a picture of Jesus Christ. I'm going to tell

you certain things that He said...I'm going to tell you certain things that He did....I'm going to tell you certain things that happened to Him - - and I'm going to tell you how He reacted to those things. And what I'm telling you is true. Now, once I've told you these things about Jesus Christ, perchance you will react as I've reacted, and most particularly, maybe you will react the exact way that Thomas did, because I've just spoken to you about Thomas in this chapter; and once you have seen Jesus Christ as I've presented Him to you, then maybe you can say as I have said, as Thomas has said it for me - - "My Lord and my God!" Then once this happens to you, then you have life - - you begin to live!

For if you can believe that God is...

if you can believe that God is great and God is gracious....

if you can believe that God loves you...if you can believe

that your life is important to God

....then all of these things determine the way you live day by day. You see, that's exactly what belief does. It created the mood and the temper by which you and I live each hour, day by day.

Because God gives me the privilege, I sit sometimes in the counseling session. And I can sense - - it's as clear as the mid-day sun, the uneasiness and the tension, because of the doubt that exists in someone's mind about their future, or about their relationship with a particular person - - because they can no longer believe - - their life is unsettled and un-nerved....but once faith is restored, the night becomes as the day.

If I could not believe that God is....

If I could not believe that my life is important to God....

If I could not believe that some day there is the Day of Judgment....

If I did not believe that your relationship with my life is impor-



tant and my relationship to you is important, I think I would be of all people the most miserable.

C When we lived in South Williamsport the Parsonage was located on Howard Street. There was an interesting thing on that street - - almost every person on that street belonged to Messiah's Church, except the people who lived next door. And one day when new neighbors came I stopped to visit, and the oddest thing happened. She never so much as said to me, where do these people work who live on this street?...what's their financial rating?...what are they like? She only raised one question: "Are all of the people on this street believers?"

O Bless her soul, she asked the question that really matters most, echoing something of G. K. Chesterton, you know, who told about a man who went to look for a lodging place in a strange city, and he said the man would be far better off if he'd forget about a lot of questions that he might ask the land-lady if he simply looked her straight in the eye and said, "Madam, what is your total view of the universe? - - what do you think about God?" ....because if in his own mind he could record her as a believer in God, then he could trust himself under her roof.

Y When I came back several weeks ago, there was an accumulation of correspondence. One of the letters was from the character who walks the streets in my home town, a man pushing his 80's, who had had a distinguished career, written a textbook, still used in the college from which he had graduated. Then something happened. He deteriorated. And some people call him the town tramp.

I have been fortunate enough to keep a relationship with him all through the years. The letter that was on my desk was an eight-page letter in which he tells me about southeast Asia - - all the places that he had visited in 1910,



and the things for which I should look. Then he gives a little bit of a philosophical gem every now and then, but there's something that troubles me: because he took it upon himself to charge me, that I shouldn't worry much about all of those people who don't believe in Jesus Christ. It's far better, he said, to let them be in the religion that they've always had....

..."Don't go and change them, Raymond" was his advice - -

"It doesn't make any difference what they believe."

This is far too common in the minds of many people. For you see, those of us who have come to know Jesus Christ have the guarantee of eternal life! Doesn't it make any difference to me, then, that there should be people who do not know Jesus Christ? Doesn't it make any difference to me that they should die outside the faith? I told you that first Sunday that I returned to this pulpit that I am haunted, and I still find myself vexed by the thought that there are millions upon millions of people who will never know Jesus Christ.

Now I trust God to handle them in His own wisdom and love - - I'm not afraid about that.....but I'm greatly distraught by the number of people to whom it makes no difference whatsoever that they should die that way.

Stephen Neal in his book "The Eternal Dimension" tells about a dream that he had in which he went to a theological seminary---a theological seminary! - - and he said to those students studying for the ministry..."The trouble with you is that you've lost what was once referred to as a 'passion for souls' - - you have no burning desire to claim people for Jesus Christ!" ...and today's generation of theological students, said Stephen Neal in his dream, laughed at him. Stephen Neal says, "You may laugh at me if you wish, but I shall go away and I shall weep."

John had come to know Jesus Christ.

John says, "He is the author, He is the giver of life.

...I know what I believe about Him, and I've written  
a record now, that you might be encountered by Him,  
and that as you come to know Him you might believe,  
and that in Him you might have life eternal!"

....it's as wonderful as all that!

And it's happened to you - - - hasn't it?

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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April 12, 1964

"GOOD SHEPHERD"

The sermon on this day bears the title "Good Shepherd", and the text is from the Gospel for the day, it's the 11th verse of the 10th chapter of John:

"I am the good shepherd."

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My colleague with whom I was associated on the special mission to India is not by nature an excitable nor an emotional person; yet on our way to India as we stopped in the Holy Land, he came forth with unexpected vigor and enthusiasm, when as we were driving along the country-side he spotted a shepherd with his flock of sheep. He immediately asked our driver to stop, and everything else had to be put aside, until we waited, until we could get what we thought was an excellent photographic shot of the shepherd and his sheep.

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My colleague has been a preacher of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ for almost forty years. I know his commitment to Jesus Christ, and I know how he is always proclaiming the love of God, as we know it in Christ. And I am reasonably certain that uppermost in his mind is that shepherding love of God - - for my colleague, in company with all of us, clings tenaciously to the imagery of God which reveals Him as the shepherd.

We'll never have done with it. We may live in the West - - you may never travel in the Holy Land. Chances are, in your lifetime, you may see but one, two, three or four real shepherds. We who live in this highly technical age, industrialized as it is, have a way of going on, when we think of God, to use the imagery of the good shepherd.

I think I know the reason why. If we don't go to the Bible lands, at

least we'll read about Bibld lands, and we are romantically touched by the concept of God in His shepherding love. Because in Bible days, in the land of the prophet and in the land of Jesus Christ, the most beloved of all figures on Palestinian hillsides was the shepherd.

Let me describe him for you, and I shall endeavor to describe him for you as I tell you something of his equipment.

C You know what the shepherd's garb looks like. I shan't describe that. But he has certain special equipment with which you may not be familiar. For instance, there is what is called the scrip -- in reality it is nothing but a bag, made out of skin, or perhaps woven cloth. Invariably it's slung over his shoulder, and in that bag he carries his own provisions...a chunk of bread...some dried fruit...a little bit of cheese...perhaps some olives - - the shepherd, too, must live. This is part of his own personal equipment.

O And then he always has the sling. David and his slingshot, you know - - David was the shepherd lad - - and what does he do with his slingshot? He did not rely, the shepherd in the East, upon the sheep-dog as we know it here in the West. And the shepherd constantly had to be aware of the fact that one of his sheep might be straying, and this could happen at some distance from where he was standing. Now how to get them back?

P Y ...very cleverly, with his slingshot in his hand, taking very careful aim, piercing through the air would go his shot, and always aimed just about eight inches above the nose of the straying sheep---never to hit the sheep, but always to startle it, and then he would call to the sheep and it would come back. Ah, yes, occasionally he'd use his slingshot to ward off some attacking animal.

He also carried with him his staff, which was nothing but a wooden stick,

and a very formidable one at that. At the head of the stick, perhaps a little larger than my fist, was its head, spiked with metal. This would be hanging from his belt. He would seldom if ever use it on his sheep, you see, but always to protect them from any animal that might attack them. Essential equipment.

C And then he had his rod, often recognized by us as the crook, or the staff as we sometimes think of it. It had the crooked, the carved end, and you know why it was fashioned like that - - in case one of the sheep or a kid might be straying and about to go over a ravine, he very deftly could stretch it out, put it around one of the legs and carefully draw it back and retrieve it. ...and then it had another use - - the shepherd was responsible for the constant watchfulness over his sheep. That meant night and day, day and night... ...and if he did not bring them into the village where they had a communal shelter, and they were out on the hillside, he would take them to some cliff, some open cave, or he might even have built in advance a shelter for them, and as they went into the enclosure he'd stoop over, he'd stretch forth his rod, and he would require, he'd force his sheep to step over it...and as they stepped over it he would examine them for any hurt or injury that they might have experienced in the course of the day.

P Y And from your knowledge of the shepherd you know very well that, if necessary, he would give his life for the sheep. For the most part they were not raised for slaughter, they were raised for the wool. and that meant he would keep his sheep over a period of years, and a close, intimate relationship developed between the shepherd and his sheep.

And then I must tell you this - - perhaps one of the most winsome, one of the most appealing things in the life of the shepherd: the shelter out on the hillside had no door. In the village the sheep-fold had doors, but to

the open cave in the country-side there was only the opening. He would bring his sheep there - - they could rest securely, protected, at night-time...only because the shepherd himself would serve as the door. He would place himself right across the entrance so that no alien animals could come into the sheep-fold, the cave, without going over him. He risked his life to protect his flock.....

C ...small wonder, then, that down through the years you and I, in company with all mankind, have clung tenaciously to the concept of God and His shepherding love. This not only is the kind of God we want, this is the kind of God we need, and this precisely is the kind of God that He is.

O There are many interesting legends in Jewish history. Here's one that I want to tell you now, that the Jew loved to describe, to tell other people, as how it happened that Moses was chosen as the leader of the people of Israel.

P Moses, according to this Jewish legend, was watching the sheep of his father-in-law. And then he discovered that one of them went astray. He went rushing after it, in order to retrieve it, impatient with a sheep that would go astray. But when he found it, it was drinking water from a well.

Y According to Jewish legend, God now spoke to Moses, and God says:

"Moses, I have watched what you have done. You went after a sheep that was going astray, and when you found it, and the reason that led it astray, you did not rebuke it or chastize it - - "

(because this is what Moses did - - he said to the sheep that had gone astray, "O, it was water that you were after!" - so beautifully does the Jewish legend put it..."It was water that you were after. You must be very tired, you must be very weary from your search. Now as you are restored



back to the flock, I myself will carry you. You must be that weary!")

...and God said:

"Moses, because you dealt so patiently, because you dealt so lovingly with another man's sheep, I appoint you now to be the shepherd over My flock!"

C ...it's a precious story, only a story, of course, but for the Jew, as well as for you and for me, it tells us what God at heart is - - one who loves us, one who cares for us, one who deals patiently with us. You and I go on holding to the concept of the shepherding love of God, not only because this is what we want and this is what we need, but, above all else, this is exactly what God is.

O But I stand before you now to call to your attention two aspects of the life of the shepherd that are quite often overlooked.

P You and I think of the shepherd as one who offers us protection, security and shelter. When you and I think of life we're always looking for this kind of thing. And when you and I think of the shepherd, we're also thinking of one who has a look of all sweetness and compassion on his face.

Y But let me tell you about something that I saw that I didn't like, and I dare say you wouldn't like it at first, either. It's one of the mementos that we brought back from our trip around the world. It just came in the mail this past week, it was shipped from Hong Kong, the New Territories area.

One afternoon we went there. We went to a Christian establishment that ministers to men who have come from Red China who at one time had been Buddhist monks. Now under the influence of the Christian religion they have embraced the Christian faith. They have yet to serve as Christian ministers. The Church says, what can we let you do to glorify the name of Christ? A very

able pastor discovered that some of them were very clever artists. So they've taken porcelain, and they paint upon porcelain Biblical truths. And one of the mementos that we have that we'd like to share with you when you come to the Family Night series the last week in April is this plate that interprets the role of the Good Shepherd...

...but you won't like His face. It is an angered shepherd, completely infuriated. One thing that you and I don't want upon the face of God is an angry face. But here is the shepherd, enangered. And the reason? Behind his flock, facing the shepherd, is an attacking wolf ...and He has His staff in His hand, about to ward him off, despising, even hating anyone who would come to attack His precious flock.

It's one thing to think about the shepherd with the look of sweetness and compassion on His face.....but this, too, is also the story of God - - the God who becomes infuriated, the God who can hate the forces of evil. He not only protects us against it, but for those of us who would follow in His name we must realize that we, too, must reach the point where we, too, must become infuriated by all that is evil...a prospect that we don't care to think about, but it's there.

And then there is another aspect of the shepherding love that you and I oftentimes ignore. You can read it for yourself in the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to John. It tells us about the shepherd who not only brings his sheep in, that they might have shelter and security and protection...but it also tells us about a shepherd who leads his flock out - - he will not allow them to remain within a sheltered area forever. There comes a time when they must go out and face the wind on the hill - - there comes a time when they must go out and brave the elements - - there comes a time when they have to go out

and travel a treacherous path. This, too, the shepherd does. It's not a very appealing thing, to think that God would permit in your life and in my life a degree of unsettlement, but God does. There are times when God deliberately takes us away from our peace and from our quiet and says - - "Out there is where you belong - - in the new frontier of life - - at the battle's edge." ...this, too, is part of the shepherd's role.

But I would remind you that when that does happen, that He Himself leads the way. He never takes us into any experience except what He Himself has already known, and He guides and directs and protects in the process.

One of the things that disturbs me most in the practice of the Christian religion (and I use the word 'practice' reverently) is the fact that all too frequently you and I think of God only in terms of shelter and protection, and we forget the unsettlement that He deliberately permits in our lives. With whatever degree of maturation God permits my life, I am convinced that the unsettled moments, when some new crisis occurs, when some new frontier has to be faced, can prove themselves the most profitable, because then as perhaps in no other way do I rely upon the help and the strength that only God can give.

I do not know what lies ahead for you, but in all likelihood there will be some chapter of unsettlement in your life, when you may have to take an untrodden path, not only untrodden, but also perilous and dangerous....but God, who is the Good Shepherd will be there ahead of you, to guide you and to direct you. This I most certainly believe.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE DISHONEST STEWARD"

Today's sermon, bearing the title "Unjust Steward" is one in the series based upon the parables of our Lord. The text for today's sermon is from the 16th chapter of Luke, it's the 8th verse:

"And the lord commended the unjust steward,  
because he had done wisely: for the children  
of this world are in their generation wiser  
than the children of light."

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Let me begin by telling you what may be a surprise to you - - this is the story about a very bad man. And what may be also a surprise to you is this - - that Jesus deliberately told this story about a bad man that he might use him as a good example. This is a very shocking thing, and in all likelihood the people who heard Jesus tell this story couldn't quite understand it. And down through the centuries people who read this story in the Bible find it quite difficult to appreciate, let alone understand.

And I have reason to believe that almost every sermon that's preached on this subject begins in much the same way that I'm beginning this sermon. There is difficulty in this passage of Scripture - - difficulty for the simple reason that it's the story about a bad man who was the central character in the story, and what is more, it's the bad man who is being used as a good example, and all of this coming from the lips of Jesus Christ.

If by any chance you did not read this passage before you came to church this morning, let us take a minute or two to review the facts in the case. As was the custom for Jesus Christ, He spoke divine truth by using, on occasion, a story, we call them parables. That's what He's doing on this occasion.....

...and He's telling about a man who worked for somebody else. The man

for whom he worked was a very wealthy man, and his business had grown to such an extent that he himself could not manage it, so he gets, he employs a steward, that means a business manager, who is in charge of all the business affairs. And then the man who owns the business simply, at the end of the year, checks the balances and lives off the earnings, because he has permitted himself to believe that he can trust his manager.

C But in due process of time he discovers that his manager is not trustworthy. For one reason or another, I cannot tell you, he does not dismiss him summarily, but he does give him notice - - "You can no longer be in my employ."

O Now the culprit, realizing that his days are numbered, finding himself in this embarrassing predicament, makes the most of the remaining time. And this is what he does.....

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...he calls in the people who owe money to his master---he's still in a position of authority - - and so he says to each one in turn, "How much do you owe?"...and suppose the man says 100 measures of wheat--the business manager says, "Well, why don't we settle for about 60 or 75? Now that's all you have to pay---it's a kind of a personal favor that I'm working for you. If you want to pay it now, let me mark the bill paid today - - it's finished business!"  
...now he did this in a number of different instances, always cutting down the figure that is owed, short-changing his master, but so exploiting the situation that it works to his own personal benefit.....

...now this, too, came to the attention of his master, and of all things, the master reacts in this way - - "Why, that rascal! Why, he's a little devil! - -



...look what he's done - - even to the very end! he continues his skuldugery and he takes advantage of the situation to benefit himself. He's a clever fellow! - - albeit he's a rascal." .....now that's what his master said about him.

C And then Jesus says, "The master had a right to commend this man who did unjustly. And I say to you, the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Jesus, with purpose and deliberate intent, says, "He's a bad man, this unjust steward, but we can well afford to take a page from his book. I hold him before you as a good example."

O A good example of what? That's what you and I have to figure out. We can trust our Lord. Why, then, did our Lord use this bad man as a good example?

I think I know at least three reasons.

P First of all, the unjust steward recognizes his plight in his situation, and he knows that immediate direct action has to be taken. Now, you have to give the man credit for something like that. He doesn't say to himself, "I will wait on somebody else to resolve this situation for me".....oh, no.....  
Y ...he doesn't say, "I'll twiddle my thumbs and in the meantime wait for something to happen".....he doesn't for a minute permit himself to think that time itself will take care of the problem, that maybe his friends will form a pressure group and get him out of it, or that maybe by some strange miracle his master will have a change of heart.."I'll just wait".....ah, no...  
....rascal that he is, he says, this is a situation that requires action--immediate action, and he wastes no time.

Jesus Christ is commending a man, who in a situation like that, calls the situation by name, and decides to act immediately.



The second reason I think our Lord commended this man, or uses him as a good example, bad as he was, is that he recognized that he had to use extraordinary techniques, so Jesus commends him, even as the master commends him, because he was resourceful. Business as usual will not prevail here...

...."I've got to think....I've got to outwit everybody involved..

..I've got to be as clever as I can be, and I've got to explore every possibility, and then when the time comes, I'll use the best possible one...."

C ...and I dare say, had you lived in this day, and had you been surveying the situation as other people surveyed the situation, you might come to the same conclusion that others have come to: well, it's the most clever thing that the fellow could have done; surely the chap was resourceful, because now, you see, these people could not forget how he had befriended them.

O  
P And the third thing, as I would think that it would prompt our Lord, even as the master himself commended the unjust steward for doing what he did, this fellow acted with singleness of purpose - - he knew that he was involved, and everything he did was aimed and directed toward the end of getting him out of the predicament, everything that he did was with singleness of purpose.

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Now Jesus Says...." - - the children of this world are in their generation wiser than we - - "

to wit: ...they call their situation by name

...they see how they are involved

...they decide to do something, and they always keep their objective in mind

...and they harness all of their energies toward that purpose.

If our Lord would be here this morning preaching this sermon, if our Lord had gathered us together as a little band of disciples, as He gathered His disciples when this story was first told, any one of us might say to Him....."Master, would you care to deal in specifics?

..would you like to tell us how this thing applies to us in

our day? ...what are you trying to tell us? -- 'the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light' -- how does that apply to

Saint Luke Church?...how does it apply to me as a Christian? - "

Well, He might look at one of us, and He'd say, "Can't you speak out of your own knowledge? Can't you speak out of your own experience?"

And then if I were given the opportunity to speak, I'd say, "Yes, Lord. I think I know what you mean - - -"

...because I'm thinking now of something that occurred a number of years ago. A man by the name of Gray was a missionary to India. He came back on furlough. He was in New York City. He had an appointment with some of the church officials. He found out that his appointment was for a later hour than what he had intended, so he had several hours on his hand. And then it occurred to him that one of his school-mates was in the big city---he'd go pay a visit to him. Surely it would be wonderful to renew acquaintance. ....he found out that his school-mate was now in the big city as a ballet dancer. He went to the studio where he was receiving instruction. The missionary from India identifies himself. He is forced to wait two and one-half hours before his one-time school-mate emerges to greet him.....his school-mate says, "It was very important that I not be interrupted; I was trying to master a single step in this particular dance." ....Missionary Gray muses

on this instance...."Do I," says he, "do I as a missionary of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ devote myself with so great singleness of purpose that I allow for no interruption? Here is my friend, a ballet dancer -- important as ballet dancing may be to our culture -- here he is, not allowing anything to interfere, that that step might be mastered. Do I apply so great diligence to the practice of my Christian religion?"

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Don't think that I got out of bed this morning on the wrong side of the bed. I'm not in a bad mood. How could anyone be in a bad mood on a day as beautiful as this? But if I appear hard-hitting in this sermon, it's only because by the grace of God I'm trying to echo something of the voice of the spirit of the One who first told the story....

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...we who live in metropolitan Washington -- the longer I am here the more I am absolutely amazed how much energy is spent, how much time is dedicated, how much money is devoted by people who are intent in advancing themselves, politically or socially!

Y  
....the longer I am here, I am absolutely amazed at the way people are perfectly willing to regulate their lives in order to get in one night of pleasure, one weekend of pleasure -- how they will save -- what things they won't pass by, in order that this should be kept!

Said the Lord Jesus Christ, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light -- they know what they want -- they are willing to work toward that end -- they give themselves completely to it."

Of course I reacted to it just as you reacted to Nikita Khrushchev's comment on his 70th birthday. If we didn't read anything else we read this:

" ..... there isn't much time left -- "      What I know of Nikita

Khrushchev is this: he is an apostle of godless communism. And you may rest assured that whatever time he has left, it gets all of his energy. He will live and die a communist - - at least that's the way it appears now - - and everything that he has will be directed toward that end.

C I don't know how much time I have left. You don't know how much time you have left. It may be reasonable to surmise that some of us may have more time left than he has. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, will I permit these remaining years to be so directed for the purposes of the Kingdom as will the apostle of godless communism allow his remaining years to be devoted to the philosophy that claims his allegiance?

O To the everlasting credit of this culprit, the unjust steward, he knew that time was running out, he acted immediately.....he was as resourceful as he could possibly be, and he always worked with one thing in mind.

P We are the children of light!

We know to whom this world belongs!

God has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ!

Y ...dare we say that we are as resourceful, as wholehearted  
and as immediate in our concern as the people of the  
world?

This sermon should hit every one of us mighty hard.

And that's the way Jesus intended it when He spoke it.

It is as serious as all that.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer by Pastor Shaheen - April 19, 1964

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O GOD, this is not the first time that we have turned to Thee with a prayer upon our hearts or upon our lips this day. Were not our very waking thoughts thoughts of Thee and of Thy mercy and Thy protective care?

And were there not those among us who even as they came to church this morning, in a world surrounded by beauty, where every flowering shrub quietly gives God praise, did we not think of Thee prayerfully, thank Thee for the world of beauty which Thou hast made possible for us?

BUT in moments of sober reflection, O God, we know that there is no beauty like the beauty of holiness. And there is no beauty, there is no grace, like what we behold upon the face of God in Jesus Christ. To that end we offer ourselves and all that we are in His name. Grant that we may not waste our time nor our energy on secondary things, when we come to journey's end we may have the satisfaction of hearing Thee say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful steward."

FORGIVE each of us his sin. Keep before each of us the hope of heaven. Watch over all whom we love wherever they may be.

OUR FATHER.....

"PARABLE OF THE TALENTS"  
(Luke 19:11-26)

Today's sermon, bearing the title "Parable of the Talents" is another in the series on the general theme, "The Parables of Our Lord."

C Surely you remember it from the days of Sunday School. Let me refresh your memory nonetheless. Our Lord told the story of a man who was going away. And until he returned he gave to three of his servants a certain sum of money. He gave them to understand that when he would come back he would take them to task for what they had done with what he had given them.

O The story is concluded in this manner....

The master returns.

One servant says...."Here! You gave me five - - I have ten to show you!

I invested what you gave me. I got a good return."

P One man comes and says...."Look! You gave me two - - I have four to show you! I've doubled what you gave me!"

...to each of these men the master says the same thing:

Y "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over few things - - I'll make you faithful over many."

...and then he enlarged his original gift to each of these men.

But then there was the third man.

And the third man came to the master and showed him exactly the very same thing which had been given to him. And he explained in this way...

"Master, I know that you are hard and severe, that you are very, very exacting. I wanted so much to give back



to you exactly what you gave me. So I went and I took what you gave me and I hid it. I give it back to you now."

Now the strangest of all things happens.

C Jesus, the teller of this story, takes this man to task, rebukes him, chastizes him. And you and I protest - - - Jesus, how could you? After all, the man did nothing wrong! After all, he did return exactly what you gave him! He did not spend the money unwisely....at least give the man credit for this, Jesus, when you tell the story.

But Jesus was telling the story for a purpose.

O And in the telling of the story He says, "This third man is to be condemned - - I shall take away from him, now, what he returns to me, and I'll give it to these other men." That's the story.

P It's never enough just to read the story. You must ask yourself certain questions....a question such as this:

...who told the story?

...why did he tell the story?

...to whom was the story told?

...and, when?

Y ...it's the last of these questions that engages our specific attention now. This story was not told when our Lord was beginning His ministry. The story was told as He came to the end of His ministry. The story was told after He had been associated with these disciples for several years. He had come to know them, and in all likelihood He had detected something in their basic philosophy that bothered Him a great deal. And now there had come over his disciples a kind of spiritual complacency.

Now you and I can understand why it occurred. He had been telling them about the Kingdom of Heaven. He had been telling them about the wonderful thing that was going to be established here on earth, and they had given themselves to believe that one of these days, presto! chango! -- overnight -- God would establish His rule.

Because this was their basic philosophy, they permitted themselves to think.....well, then, there's nothing that I need to do in the meantime.

-- this wonderful God of ours is going to take care of  
everything -- He's going to establish His Kingdom!  
He's going to order everything exactly as it ought  
to be.....

Jesus, who knows the mind of men, undoubtedly was troubled that this should be their philosophy. So at this particular time He speaks to them this particular lesson.

Now what is the truth that you and I must allow to lay hold upon us? For truth is timeless, and what He had in mind for them He undoubtedly had in mind for us.

It seems to me as I understand this parable that Jesus was focusing all of His attention upon the third man -- the man who returns to the master what was given him, exactly as it was given him.....

...by the way, let's deal with something that I know very well troubles you. You're saying to yourself, how come that Jesus would permit a story to be told that involves the fact that not all men receive the same gifts? Now, you and I had better reckon with that, because this does trouble some people. And the sober fact of life is this: that God

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just doesn't give to everyone the same thing, nor (I say it advisedly) in equal measure. There are some who begin life with more than others. That's just the way it happens. I'm not talking about a silver spoon in one's mouth - - I'm talking, now, about natural endowment---no, not necessarily - - but I'm talking about the gifts with which one begins, the favored situation in which he may find himself, which he himself has not created, which in all likelihood he has not deserved. But the fact of life is that he begins with more than somebody else. And God permits it that way. I cannot tell you exactly why - - - but I know full well that there are some men who have five talents, and I come along limping with one....and that's just the way it is.

...but it's not for me to argue with God, not for me to complain against God. It is for me to accept this precious truth, that while God may not give the same thing to everyone, either the thing in itself or in equal measure, but God does give something to everyone. This is the point in the parable that demands attention....

...three men - - each one got something  
- two may have gotten more, but all three  
got something

All right, begin at that point. Everyone got something. It was in his hand. He began with it.

The basic Christian philosophy of life is this: that what you and I have we have because it's been bestowed upon us. The Creator given - - we receive, even at the very, very beginning.

Now because this is true, we must also recognize the truth that the same

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one who gives will hold us responsible for what we have gotten. God does not give and walk away and forget what He has given us. God has a continuing interest in every single one of us. And as the master in the story as Jesus told it returned, just so the Lord and Judge of life will return, and when He returns, He will hold us, now, equally responsible for what we've done with what He gave. Now these are the two salient truths that we must respect: ...everyone gets something ...and everyone's going to be held responsible for what he was given, and what he does with it.

Now this might strike some of us as a very unusual truth - - God invites risk. God, if I may use the figure of speech, dares us to do something, and He takes us to task when we don't do anything. Two men are commended because they did take a risk - - they might have lost what they had, but they knew it was meant to be used. And the third man was condemned because he did not use what was given him.

As I study this parable I am convinced in my mind at least, that God is not overly concerned with how successful we might be. You can read this for yourself in this parable. He does not say to the men that he commends, "Well done, thou good and successful one - - " ...but he does say, "Well done, thou good and faithful one - - - because you have used faithfully what you have received - - "

...God invites us to take what He gives us, and to faithfully use it...to invest it...to do something with it.

The longer I am in the ministry the more I am discouraged by people who suffer from the disease of disuse, the atrophy that sets in, with what they've already received. I read an exceedingly interesting thing the other day.

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Down in New Zealand they have had a most remarkable bird, an unusual bird, it's called the takahe. For a number of years they thought it was extinct. And then they found one. Why do I tell you this story? Because the takahe is a flightless bird - - it has wings that were meant to be strong but the bird doesn't fly, because the bird in its natural habitat, of all things, was in a place where there was no other animal life to frighten it or to startle it; and so the people who study birds say the takahe never saw the necessity of flapping its wings and flying into the air for safety, or perching up in some tree beyond the reach of its preyer. Because it no longer uses its wings, it's become the flightless bird, and it suffers from disuse.

This could happen to the Christian. God meant him to soar. God meant him to brave new worlds. God meant him to be adventurous.

...I did not attend the meeting the other night, because I was committed elsewhere.....but I got a report of the meeting. A group of people reported upon an experiment, taking under-privileged, socially isolated children into their church building, and offering them, in the inner city, as I recall the story now (the accounting of it), offering them home study direction, trying to encourage these youngsters how to study wisely and well, and giving them, if only for the time that they met in that church, a decent surrounding...

...because we are the way we are, somebody had to raise the question:

- - well now, does it improve their grades?

(you see, we have to be successful---we have to  
chalk up 100% every time)

...and the answer was, as I remember the story, "I am sorry to have to say, not particularly so." This does not give any man the excuse, then, not to



try a similar method somewhere else. We don't always have to be successful, but God expects us to do something, God expects us to try.

Deeply imbedded in my memory was the day when I was walking down the street and I saw a man on the opposite side. And I said, "Good morning, sir." He did not answer me.

As we neared the intersection, I said, "Good morning, Sir."

He said, "I do not think I know you."

I said, "I presume you're correct in saying that - - I don't know you. But tell me, sir, does that give me any excuse not to greet you today?"

He did not respond cordially. He may have thought me a bit queer. But in Heaven's name, God put us here to live together...God put us here, perhaps to walk a similar road. It's always worth the risk, you see. Someone must take it. And God, singing the praise of two men who took the risk.....condemning one man who didn't.

Remember what I told you - - I can't tell you why you have one talent and the man alongside of you has five. I only know God has given you something. I have been in this congregation long enough, now, to realize the untold wealth that remains to be tapped for Kingdom growth and development through Saint Luke Church...but we suffer, we suffer because there are those who feel they have nothing to contribute--nothing to say...and part of this may be because they think they can't be successful. God does not desire primarily that we be successful. God desires and God wills that we attempt.

It's Kipling for you:

"There's not a pair of legs so thin,  
There's not a head so thick;  
There's not a hand so weak and white,  
Or yet a heart so sick;  
But it can find some useful job  
That's crying to be done."



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In the first congregation that I served we had an office secretary who in the prime of life became crippled with arthritis, the worst possible kind. In the latter months that she helped us she even went to the typewriter on a kind of a wheelchair. She reached the stage where she required institutional treatment. She's out in the plains of Nebraska. It's a little bit of Heaven out there called Bethphage Mission. It was staffed originally by the deaconesses of the Augustana Lutheran Church.

It takes Esther hours, now, to be made presentable if somebody goes to visit her. She's always at the mercy of somebody else's pair of hands. And one of the worst things is - - she can't sleep at night.

She could say to herself, as I know some people would say - -

"There isn't anything that I can do....there isn't  
anything that I have to offer, to offer God."

...but Esther doesn't think that way.

Do you know what she does when she can't sleep at night? She prays. And she looks upon the remaining years of her existence in this earthly pilgrimage as a prayer priest.

You may never meet her.

And the only thing that you might know about her is what I'm telling you in this sermon.

But you're indebted to her.

She receives SAINT LUKE MESSENGER faithfully....she gets a transcribed copy of every sermon that's preached in Saint Luke Church every week.

And she prays for us. She prays that the Holy Spirit may take whatever we do in the Kingdom here and use it.

She might have said, "What do I have to offer?...crippled...arthritis....

...isolated - - - "

You, my friend, are fully ambulatory. You, my friend, possess so many faculties that she's denied. If she can do so much with so little, may God have mercy on your soul that you do so little with so much.

Some day the Judgment comes. Mark you well, it will not be a time for complaining. When you take God to task for what you didn't have, God is going to take us to task for what we've failed to do with whatever He gave us.

Now my parting thought is this: I have little patience with people who believe that because this is God's world, God will take everything in its stride, and take care of everything, just give Him a little time. There are some things that will never happen on this earth, in whatever area of betterment you may wish to choose, just because you and I may be foolish enough to believe that God can do it all by Himself. That just isn't true.

That's why God gave you and me whatever it was that we had, because there are things that have to be done here, and they are to be done through you and me.....

"If my hand slack'd, I should rob God,  
Since He is fullest good, leaving a blank instead  
of violins - - "

...He could not make Antonio Stradavari's violins,

- - without Antonio.

God cannot make this a better world without you, and the point at which God wants to make this a better world happens to be at the precise place at which He put you. I'm not going to give you the blueprint. You ought to be spiritually sensitive enough, and you ought to be alert enough, to have your eyes opened as to what you do next.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO BUILD A TOWER"  
(Luke 14:25-33)

Today's sermon, entitled "To Build a Tower" is another based upon the parables of our Lord:

"And there went great multitudes with him:  
and he turned, and said unto them,  
If any man come to me, and hate not his  
father, and mother, and wife, and children,  
and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own  
life also, he cannot be my disciple.  
And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and  
come after me, cannot be my disciple.  
For which of you, intending to build a tower,  
sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost,  
whether he have sufficient to finish it?"

While it is true that our Lord was surrounded by the disciple band, He never looked upon them as a brain-trust or a strategy group. But suppose He had? Then it would have been on this day that He would have thrown them into a frenzy, and they would have called an emergency session immediately, and they would have taken Him to task.

They might have talked to Him like this:

"What happened? Are you fully aware of what you  
did today? Don't you realize the ground we've  
gained? Didn't it ever occur to you that if you  
go on speaking like you've spoken to the people  
today, the chances are we won't have a  
corporal's guard left:"

...you see, they've been with Him for three years, and chances are they could have spoken to Him that plainly, because by this time they felt they had a lot at stake, too. They had forsaken much, and they were following Him.

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And now, seemingly, He's given to an about-face. He had never talked quite like this before. Up to this point He was the Christ with the outstretched arms, saying, "Come unto me" - - invitingly, you see - - "I will give you rest....Let the weary turn to me - - the burden that you have when you come to me will be easy - - my yoke is easy - - "

...now as He speaks to the people, it's a severe, a demanding Christ, and a very exacting one.

He doesn't talk about what He's going to give them; He talks about what they have to give to Him. He doesn't talk, now, about the proffered gift of eternal life; He talks about the price that they have to pay in this present world, if they want to be numbered in His company. Before, you see, He had invited; now He seems to repel. Before He had made it very attractive; now He makes it very exacting. The least His disciples could say to Him was this....

"Master, this surely isn't any way to win friends and influence people. You'd better change your tactics. This can happen once in a while, but for heaven's sake, don't make this a regular diet!"

....but no one, of course, dictates to Jesus Christ what He's going to say or what He's going to do. And thank heavens they were not a strategy group - - thank heavens they were not a brain trust! They were the company of the disciples who were in duty bound to follow where He led.

Now, we have to understand why He turns about, because you're asking, naturally so, are there two Christs? Are there two sides to His nature? Can He compel and can He repel? Can He attract and can He discourage? What, now, will we do with this?

Well here again, as we said in last Sunday's sermon, you'll have to bear in mind not only who said what to whom, but where and when it was said. Jesus Christ is saying this, now, in the year of His popularity. He's riding the crest of the wave. Before Him now, not just a corporal's guard, before Him is a multitude that possibly could have been numbered into the thousands. And to these people, in the time of His popularity, He now says:

"If any man wants to come after me and to be my  
disciple, there's a price that has to be paid - - "

...and then He spells it out in the boldest - - in the boldest of all terms - -

"You may even have to hate your own wife, your own son,  
your own daughter - - "

...and when He used that word hate He's implying that no one, absolutely no one, can ever stand in the way between Him and His disciple. The Oriental was given to this kind of imagery. The Oriental was given to this kind of strong and exaggerated speech, because it was the only way that sometimes they could drive a point home forcefully. Whatever Jesus Christ is saying, He is saying this:

"If any man wants to come after me and be my  
disciple, then no one, absolutely no one, can be  
of more importance than I am. I want everything!  
- - - all! - - or nothing! "

...these are not my words. They're the words of Jesus Christ.

Now, why did He use them?

Why is He so demanding, why so exacting? Why so severe?

Well you know, of course you do, that when Jesus Christ came from Heaven above He identified Himself fully with the people here on earth. He lived

with us...He knows the ways of men....He knows the mind of man. Now after observing these people, He recognizes undoubtedly the truth, that men follow a leader for any one of a number of different reasons.

Now you and I must ask this question right now: why did people flock to hear Jesus Christ? This is a question He Himself asked.

Well, some people flocked out of curiosity....

...who is this man?

...if many people will attend the rally, we will  
go along

...I'd like to know what's going on, I'd like to  
know what gives

....well there are people like that who followed Jesus Christ - - out of curiosity.

Then there were some people who came and followed Him because they were impressed with what He had to offer - - they didn't know exactly what it was - - but He had something, and sufficient for them to know this - that there were other people who were going after it, and therefore they would identify themselves with the group, because it looked like a good thing!...

...and therefore through their association with this man and the rallies He was conducting, they might exploit this relationship, to their own good! This is not an uncommon thing among people.

Then, thank God, there were those out of true spiritual sensitivity who felt in Jesus Christ the claim of God upon their hearts which they could not ignore, and they had to be there.

Now the besetting sin of the Christian Church has always been, as I see it, folks who come and follow at a distance - - folks who recognize, but fol-



low on their own terms - - folks who make up the periphery. This has been part of our weakness. And so, according to the mind of Christ, He deliberately says to the people who came to hear Him on this occasion:

"If you want to come after me, that's one thing;  
but if you want to be my disciple, that's something  
else. For no man can be my disciple unless he is  
willing to follow me all the way! - - "

C ...for any man who deserves the title 'disciple' must be a follower, a follower all the way! If you're not a follower, you're not a disciple. And the disciple and the follower must always be in close intimate relationship with the leader. You can't be a disciple without a leader...and the fact that you follow the leader makes you the disciple.....

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"Now," says He, "It's on this basis that I'm talking  
to you now. Reckon with the cost - immediately. If  
you're going to come after me and be my disciple,  
know that you're in for something!"

The pastor, whether it's right or wrong, is to all intents and purposes the chief evangelist of a congregation. You look to him more than you look to any other person in the congregation to spread the Good News - - to interest other people in the Kingdom - - to be your spokesman for Jesus Christ - - to enlist other people to affiliate with the congregation. This is not his task alone, however. But the pastor is forever on the look-out for souls, and he's a straight-shooter for souls. His every objective is another soul for Jesus Christ.

But alas and alack, frequently in his relationship with people there are those who say something in this fashion: I'm willing to become a member of your church, Pastor, but don't expect too much! When our Lord Jesus Christ

was here on earth He said to the people who wanted to come after Him:

"If you want to come after me you've got to expect a great deal. You have a right to expect a great deal from me! I will give you everything! - - I give you this earth--it's yours in which to live ...I will give you the fruitage of all the finest minds that have been here before you...I will make available for you the wisdom of God - - I will make available for you the very love of God! ...I will give that love to you completely ...I will give you everything - - all earth and Heaven too - - you have a right to expect much....and it will be yours. "

...but by the very same token Jesus Christ says to any man who would come after Him:

"I have the right to expect much from you. If any man wants to be my disciple, I expect total commitment, I expect complete allegiance!"

...and then He spelled it out for those people the way He did.

The tragedy for many people is this: that they give themselves half-heartedly to exceedingly wonderful things.

The tragedy for many people is this: they want just a little bit of God, they want just a little bit of church, they want just a little bit of truth.

Ah, they don't want to live in a world that's called godless--ah, no! they'll have none of that! But somewhere, somehow, in the course of their

own relationship with life they'll keep a door ajar just a bit, they'll keep a window open just a little bit, that they might see, as someone has said, if only one star shining in the universe - - if only somehow even remotely, they can keep themselves in league, in touch with even God Himself.....this is sufficient. But people who are half-hearted limp along on half-steam.

C Every now and then in the course of my ministry I sit down and try to evaluate it. This a man should do, especially if God has given him the fortune to serve at least two decades. There was a time when I had a feverish desire to touch as many people as possible, in any way that I could. You can understand this. And that's one reason why the schedule in Saint Luke O Church is as full as it is, and that's one reason why the program that we offer is as varied as it is - - to be as much as we can to as many people as we can as often as we can.

P But I do not for a single moment short-change the desirability and the necessity of singling out people and challenging them to a degree of commitment by which they give everything that they have to the ongoing program of Jesus Christ, and cultivating that group, nurturing it, and seeing it grow and develop.

Y This, precisely, is what our Lord Jesus Christ did on this occasion. To a thousand and more people standing in front of Him He proclaimed the Gospel, and was glad that they were there to hear. But for all that was ahead, He said, "This calls for tough going - - this calls for totally committed discipleship - - it involves seeing the thing through to the very end!" .....and then He turned around and He looked to a handful of people, and searchingly He said - - "If you want to be my disciple, then make up your mind right now that you're going to be with me all the way!"

I'm honest enough with you, I don't know if any man can tell at the beginning what the total cost is going to be. Any man who builds a house tries to get his estimates, but he knows that there's always the figure over and beyond with which he must reckon. He may not know exactly. I cannot tell you as the Pastor, the shepherd and the bishop of your souls, the exact price that you may have to pay for being a follower of Jesus Christ, the nature and the character of it, and what it may be tomorrow morning at 10:00 o'clock.

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But I only know this: that when Jesus Christ bids a man to come after Him--it may not be much of a man that He may invite, but of that man He expects everything that he has. And Why? Because the Kingdom depends upon total commitment. And why? Because you and I never know true joy until we are the totally committed. I use the word joy advisedly. Do you know that I think it can be established, and I think scientifically so, that there are only two really happy groups of people in this world - - the simple-minded and the single-minded! And our Lord Jesus Christ spoke about a joy that is full, and that joy is known only by those who commit themselves whole-heartedly to His way and to His truth.

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My friend, if you're frustrated, if you lack a spring in your step, if you no longer have a light in your eye, do you know what? It could be that you're a half-hearted Christian - - honestly, now! But there's a remedy for it. It's the prescription of Jesus Christ:

" ...Give me everything!

Try my way always, in all strata of society

Try my way always, in your own personal religious life,

in your political life, in your social relationships

Try my way - - always."

...You can afford to trust Him. It may be a heavy price to pay. But think of the price you pay if you don't!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 10, 1964

"WHEN IS A HOME CHRISTIAN?"

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The sermon series based upon the parables of our Lord is interrupted today, that on this Sunday we might consider the question, "When is a Home Christian?" Any number of pages in the New Testament could be found to furnish a text, perhaps none quite as appropriate as one that's found in the Epistle lesson for today:

"Above all hold unfailing your love for one another - - " (1 Peter: 8)

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But the real inspiration for the sermon has come from a prayer of the Church, a prayer that reflects much that you find in Scripture itself. It is from the marriage service.

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As you well know if you have attended a wedding, the couple stand in the shadow of the altar, they publicly declare their faith and their love in one another, they exchange their vows, then they kneel to receive the blessing of the Church. And before the service is formally concluded there are three prayers, the three prayers that precede the praying of the Lord's Prayer and the benediction. Let me read for you now the last of these three prayers....

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O GOD, who art our dwelling-place in all generations; Look with favor upon the homes of our land; enfold husbands and wives, parents and children, in the bonds of thy pure love; and so bless our homes, that they may be a shelter for the defenceless, a bulwark for the tempted, a resting-place for the weary, and a foretaste of our eternal home in thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now if you were to ask me, when is a home Christian? - - I might find it difficult to answer, because it's not easy to say when a person is Christian. You can't always judge by his deeds. God alone searches the heart of a



man and knows his mind. God alone knows what motivates us to do certain things, and why we hesitate to do things that we ought to do. It may not be an easy thing sometime to ascertain what is the basic characteristic of a home, any more than it might be to ascertain the basic characteristic of a person.

C Yet we do have certain measuring-rods, and we do have certain yard-sticks. This descriptive that comes from the Prayer of the Church at the time when a couple is being united in Holy Matrimony and a home is being established is as excellent a measuring-rod as any that I can propose for you now. A home can be called Christian when in itself it reflects and mirrors something of heaven. A home can be called Christian when it is a foretaste of heaven itself. The Church has done wisely in incorporating this basic thought into its prayer.

P You know, of course you do, that the home is the basic unit in society. All that we first learn we learn within the confines of the family circle. When God had this world in mind and when He put us here He put us into family units. And this was done for a purpose: that in the interplay of mind and spirit you and I, within a small group, might get our first lessons of life, that we might be sheltered and protected as we need to be sheltered and protected, that we might be guided and directed as we need to be guided and directed, ere we go out and face the world itself.

Y I have not come to this pulpit this morning to deride all the factors that are at play against the home today. The home, it has been said, more than any other unit in society, is experiencing deterioration, that it no longer has its effective influence for good upon the life of our people. The home has become so 'secularized' - the church people put it that way.....family life has



become so divided....father and mother both work.....again and again when any pastor endeavors to talk to people about family devotions, immediately the cry comes back - - we would like so much to have family devotions, but how can we? look what our schedule is like - - we hardly ever see one another any more....

C ...you see, we suffer from the kind of world in which we live, and because this is true, there are those who have maintained in certain quarters of the world that family life as we once knew it no longer serves its useful purpose.

O In one section of our world, heavily populated, the structure of family life has been changed. They live on a communal pattern - - the child at an early age is taken to the nursery, and there his life is molded by people other than his parents, and his parents give themselves wholeheartedly to the pattern of society of a "brave new world" as they put it. This is happening today, in a sizeable portion of our world, because they honestly believe that a family no longer can serve a useful purpose for society itself.

P Y Russia, not many years ago, said, we will re-structure family life; and so they made changes accordingly. They have seen the unwisdom of their way. Russia has re-thought this thing. Now the family is coming back to its rightful place in society in the Russian scheme of things.

When God had mankind in mind, He said the family is to be the basic unit. If the family is to be the basic unit, how can it best serve its purpose? - - how can it reflect something of heaven itself?

Well, let me say this to you - - it does not happen automatically, and it does not happen casually. Just as a person becomes a Christian through decision, so a home is made Christian because somebody has decided that's the

way it's going to be.

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Living in Montgomery County, in this particular section of the land, I am always amazed at the number of young people who are able to purchase homes and establish themselves. I recall the impressionable days of my youth.. ...sometimes there were people married 20 - 30 years, honestly now, before they were able to take title to a property and call it their home. This is one of the things they hoped for and they planned for, but in the economy of things in that day it just wasn't as possible as it is now. But this doesn't happen now, were it not for the fact that a couple getting married give themselves to purposeful planning.

Occasionally when I have an interview with a couple, weeks, sometimes months before they get married, I ask them certain questions, and invariably I find that they've given careful thought to this and they've given careful thought to that...

...as to how long he wants her to work

...as to when they will have their first child

...as to where they're going to live

...as to what they're going to do

...I'm always amazed at the amount of time people do  
give themselves to planning for the years that  
lie ahead

...but I know a measure of chagrin when I discover that all too often it's in the realm of economics, where the dollar is involved, there seems to be purposeful planning - - and this is right! - - except for one thing.....it ought not to be at the expense of the concern for one's spiritual life.

In this area in which we live I am always amazed at the number of people who are concerned as to whether or not their child gets good grades in school.

C I am not unmindful of the fact that God said, through Christ, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind".....and I would put a high premium upon the development of the intellect....but my concern as the pastor and the bishop of your souls is this: if in all your scheming, if in all your planning for what you want in your home and in your family you would only bring to the Cause of Jesus Christ similar enthusiasm and similar concern. A child who gets good grades gets good grades because he desires to study and he pays the price.....

O ...a young couple who are able to have their home -- they too get their home because they budget and they plan and they are willing to pay the price. The mortgage payment just doesn't drop down from heaven. It is always going back to the day's job....there is always, perhaps, finding an extra job to make sure that you can maintain a certain standard of living in this society. So they plan and so they purpose.

P But I plead with you, don't just take for granted that the things of the spirit take care of themselves. If a home is to be Christian, it's going to be Christian because it's planned that way. A decision has been made, and also constantly so.

Y Then what are the earmarks of it?

First of all, a decision has been made.

Then secondly, it's characterized by devotion. In this home, in this family circle, you will always find love. Says the Epistle, let it be un-failing love. If you can't find love within your family circle, then family life is failing the purpose for which God intended it.

Let me share with you a dream that I had. Mary and Joseph are utterly

overwhelmed. Mary and Joseph were told that they were to receive Jesus Christ, and they are overwhelmed with the fact that they have, and I put it to you advisedly as I can, they have Jesus Christ on their hands - - -

"God, you've given us Jesus Christ!

...what are we to do with Him?

...how should we take care of Him?

...You've entrusted Him to us! we're to have Him now,

during the impressionable period of His years - - "

...and so they turn to God, wondering what they are to do.

And then in my dream God turns to them, and He doesn't answer them the way they thought He might. He gives them no specific blue-print, He doesn't give them a book by which to rear and train Jesus.

But He does an amazing thing, as you can always expect God to do (in a dream or otherwise)....He says to Mary - -

"How much love do you have in your heart for Joseph?"

...and Mary says,

"I love him as much as any single human being can love  
another human being."

...and then in this dream God turns to Joseph and He says,

"Joseph, how much love do you have in your heart for Mary?"

...and Joseph, without any hesitation, says,

"I love her as much as any human being can love another  
human being."

And then God waited a while.

And then God said,

"I have one more question to ask you, and this time I ask

both of you at the same time: how much love do both of you  
have for Me?"

...and Mary and Joseph together answer,

"With all of our heart we love you, God."

And then God replies,

"If this is true, then let the Baby Jesus grow up surrounded  
by that love - - your love for Me, and that love reflected  
in your love for one another."

And you know what?

I can believe that dream, because I know how Jesus grew up. He increased in  
wisdom, in stature and in favor with God and man...and all of that happened,  
the Bible says, when He went down to Nazareth and was subject to two people,  
Mary and Joseph.

A home is Christian when a father and a mother have unfailing love, one  
toward another, and toward their children. For what is heaven but God's un-  
bounded love, and all who are there are there as the objectives of that love.  
With all the ardor of my soul I put this sermon precisely where it belongs..  
..in the plan of God two people marry, then this means the establishment of  
a home and a family...and everything that happens within the confines of that  
family circle is going to be determined by their attitude, one toward another.

Let me tell you something that astounded me the other day.

I listened to a man give a lecture. He shared with us the result of  
samplings of a thousand homes - - he thought on that basis he could come to a  
conclusion. For a long time I believed that when a father and a mother both  
worked, that the children in that home suffered. But this man who made a  
scientific study said it doesn't necessarily follow. He studied certain homes,



trying to discover what might be the characteristic in a home where father and mother both worked, and he found out it was not necessarily the absence of both parents at the same time or at different times that had a decisive effect upon the children, but what had a decisive effect upon the children was the attitude of the father and the mother when they were together, and when the child came between them.....that this had the lasting effect:

- - what the father thought of the mother, what the mother thought of the father...and what they together thought of the child....
- - and when the child was exposed to both parents, or to either one independently, whether it was for five minutes or for five hours, it was what the child detected in the attitude of either or both of them that had the lasting influence upon the child.

I don't know what lies ahead in the society of which you and I are a part. I only know that as I read the Scriptures and as I search to know the mind of God, He has no plans to replace the family unit. He still depends upon it, it's our only hope.

From the very beginning the first home had its great influence upon all society....the first school was in a home....the first hospital was a home...  
...the first church was in a home.

The social pattern has changed a great deal.

But one thing has not changed. The home remains the world in miniature. It can be a bit of heaven - - or it can be a bit of hell.....and the people who make up the confines of that family circle determine what it's going to be.

As Christians we are blessed in the example of that home from Nazareth.



It was so successful that when Jesus wanted to give people a word for God, there was nothing, absolutely nothing in His relationship with Joseph that deterred Him from saying, "The best word that you can use in the human vocabulary for God is 'Father'...."

....and that home in Nazareth was so successful that when Jesus tried to give us a word for heaven, without any hesitation, without any reservation, He used the word 'Home' -- 'My Father's House'.....

This is what God had in mind for the family circle.

This is what God had in mind for our family unit.

It's basic. It can fulfill God's noble objectives for it, and the Church is here to help you do it.

\* \* \*

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE MIGHTY WORKS OF GOD"

On this day of Pentecost the sermon is based upon the Epistle for the Day; and the text is the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them  
speak in our tongues the wonderful  
works of God."

C We say the same thing year after year, and every time the Day of Pentecost is mentioned this is what the preacher says: there was never a day like it, and who knows, perhaps, never a day like it since it occurred.

O What was so wonderful about it? What was so remarkable?

P The Book of the Acts of the Apostles does its best to tell us, but it's not easy to describe some exceedingly wonderful things. That's why every now and then we say, "But you had to be there to know what I am talking about - " ...that's why it's not at all uncommon to hear somebody say, "Until it happens to you, you'll never know." But in the meantime we attempt to explain it, feebly we reach for this word and try to describe it in that way. Well, the second chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is an attempt to tell us what happened. Let me fill you in with the details, and here again, but an attempt on my part to talk about something, I say it again, exceedingly wonderful.

Y Following the death of Jesus Christ, and even His resurrection, the disciples were a timid group of people. They were frightened beyond words....for a number of reasons, of course...

....they were ashamed of themselves. God had given Jesus Christ to them....they were the privileged lot....they were the disciple band.

...and then they remembered how when He needed them most - - when they might have returned to Him, even on a human level, some token of faithfulness, - - they all forsook Him and fled...and from within their own group there was the betrayer, from within their own group, there was the denier. So they were ashamed of themselves.

...they were also a bewildered company. They still just didn't know what to make of the fact that God could be exactly as wonderful as God said He would be, because after all of the terrible thing happened, Christ came back -- of all people, He came back to them!...and He offered to begin all over again with them. He gave them another portion of His unbounded love. They had never seen anything quite like that! - - and they were somewhat bewildered as to what to make of this thing. It was as tremendous as that.

...and then they were also somewhat mystified, because when He came back to them He talked like this: "You stay here. Don't go away. Keep yourselves together, this little company, and then one day the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, is going to visit you!"

...so you see, for these reasons, if not for others, they were huddled together... frightened.....timid....still not sure -- also bewildered -- "Wait!"....  
.....and then it happened.

And whatever it was, it happened to each one of them, individually, then it was expressed corporately - - the Holy Spirit visited them, in like measure to each of them, and the impact was so great that it was like a mighty rushing

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wind, and filled the whole place where they were, and they were catapulted out into the streets, and they ran out like madmen....they were a happily God-intoxicated group. Nothing like it had ever occurred before.

C Naturally the people in the streets said, "What gives?" "What goes on?" They were asked questions. Now they were the astounded ones. And because they couldn't quite figure it out, and they had to speak out of their own experience, there were those who dismissed it very lightly and said, "They're drunk with new wine."

O But there were others who kept pressing the point and said, "There's something behind this - - what does it mean?" ...and then it occurred to them, as they listened intently, why these people are not talking about themselves! - - these people aren't talking about us - - they're talking about God!

...they're talking about what God has done!

...they're talking about what God has done to them!

...they're talking about what God has done through them.

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Y Whether we like it or not, we have a way of attracting attention. People do pay attention to us, if only to take note that we're not worth a second look! But people do see us. These early Christians were such that they attracted so great attention that people had to ask questions about them, and when they asked questions about them they discovered something over and above and beyond them.

I have to ask you the question: when people pay attention to you, what is it then that they see over and beyond you? Is it a measure of God? When they put the finger upon your spiritual pulsebeat, is it most certainly God in and through you?

Let me go back and say again what I said at the beginning of the sermon: Pentecost was something that never happened before. Why doesn't it happen again? Has the day of God's wondrous deeds passed? It's a question that you and I have a right to ask. Could it be that God limited His great and wonderful things only to one particular chapter in history? - and only to one particular group of people?

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If you're inclined to answer in the affirmative, Pentecost spells the lie to that, because Pentecost proves clearly and distinctly that the God who was is the God who continues to act, that God is something more than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Old Testament - - He's the God of the Present Moment.....and as Jesus Christ was in the world, so He is now and ever will be. This is much of the meaning of Pentecost....

...God in the present times

...God alive, God active

...God speaking in and through me

...God continuing to perform His mighty acts

...and every now and then you find someone who lives by it, and miracles begin to happen. Someone once said, and I think rightly so, that what we need today isn't so much churches full of people as we need people in churches, whether few or many, who are full of God! These people on Pentecost attracted attention because they were brimful of God! They were God-inebriated - - that's exactly what they were.

Now I know very well, I know it as well as you know it, that it's always embarrassing when you talk about being brimful of God. And like as not you have peculiar notions about people who give you to feel that God is very real to them - - you begin to shy away from them, you brand them, and you feel mighty uncomfortable in their presence. For shame upon us! - - because the

most wonderful thing that can ever happen to a person is to be made God-conscious....and the finest compliment that you can pay to any man is that God is very real to him. It was a wise man, a very wise man, the president of one of our leading universities here in the east, who said that the mark of a truly educated man is the capability and the ease by which he can talk about God unashamedly.

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I suppose we feel awkward about people who talk about God, we feel embarrassed in the presence of people who are God-conscious, because there's a kind of resentment on our part. Why doesn't it happen to me? If God has given that person specific revelation, why should I be passed by? - honestly now, he's not one whit better than I am! ...and then we feel embarrassed because we're led to believe that maybe he does have an edge on us, maybe he does have an inside track, that maybe he is included in the inner company of disciples, and we're left on the outside. That's one reason, perhaps, why we feel embarrassed when we're in the presence of people who are brisful of God.

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Another reason we may be embarrassed is because it's a strange thing for us. We don't ever give God so much as the time of day! - and you always react strangely toward something that's unusual to you. Maybe if we knew Him a bit better -- maybe if we wanted to know Him a bit better, we wouldn't feel so embarrassed and uncomfortable when we're in the presence of people to whom He is so real.

But this much must be said - - the people to whom Pentecost happened were not extraordinary people. I want to tell you three things about them:

....these people who talked about the mighty acts of God were  
very simple, very plain people. If you and I would have the  
list in front of us right now, we would not be able to name



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a single extraordinary person in the lot! ...no famous men whatsoever...no outstanding personalities of the day. But as we remember what we read in the New Testament, they were plain ordinary folk. Not that God can't use the literate, not that God doesn't want the cultured - - God can do mighty things through them who have much to offer Him, but sometimes their learning and sometimes their sophistication stands in the way. I was shocked when in India a leading layman told me, "The trouble with our Church arose when we paid to high a price for education!" - - that's a terrible thing to say! ..but yet with all their learning, with all their sophistication, they failed to appreciate the meaning of a simple faith.

...these men who talked about the mighty acts of God were simple, plain, unlettered folks, who were not ashamed to put their hands and their hearts completely in the Hand and the Heart of God.

And the second thing to be said about these people who were always talking about the mighty acts of God:

...they were not the saints that you might think they were. You see, we put them in stained-glass windows centuries later - - we've put the halos on their heads and put them apart. But when the day of Pentecost had fully come, if you would have asked any one of them - "What are you?" - - he would have said, "I am a sinner" ... "I'm someone who betrayed my Lord" ... "I'm someone who denied my Lord" ... "I'm someone who ran away from Him -- I'm one who knew what God expected from me, and I never did it.....

.....but I'm also one to whom Jesus came back....

...I'm also one to whom Jesus Christ offered reconciliation,  
I'm also one to whom He offered to restore me in the bond  
of His love - - that's what I am!  
- - I'm a forgiven sinner...I'm numbered in the ranks  
of the redeemed - - I know it! - - "

And the third thing to be said about them is this:

...each one of them was looking for something over and beyond him-  
self. Each one was waiting for something that he knew could  
come to him only by the Hand of God. Jesus had said to them,  
"Now you wait! - I'm going to do something - wait expectantly!"  
...and they knew that God would not fail them.

...these are the people to whom the gift of the Holy Spirit came.

Sometimes I come here on a Saturday night, every now and then I do it.  
It's an empty church, there isn't a sound to be heard. And then I sit maybe  
where you're sitting right now. I move about. And I try to think about this  
hour on Sunday morning - - I try to picture you - - and then I offer a prayer,  
asking God to speak to you, asking God to reveal Himself, asking God that  
through the hour of divine worship on a Sunday morning you might receive what  
only God has to give....

....and with all my heart, I come back here then, on  
a Sunday morning, believing that this can happen...believing that it will hap-  
pen....believing that it does happen.

...and I'm constrained to ask you: do you come the same way? do you come ex-  
pectantly? do you come seeking at the Hand of God what only God can give?

Pentecost happened, the way it happened, because they were people who put  
their trust completely in the Hand of God, they obeyed Him, and they knew that

redeeming grace of Jesus Christ possessed them. And every time they came back into the presence of God they expected to get something.

...how expectantly do you wait upon the Lord?

That company of people went everywhere talking about the mighty acts of God.....

.....they knew what God had done

.....they knew what God had done to them

....they knew what God had done for them

...they knew what God was able to do through them

...they were brimful of God.

Someone said of Dwight L. Moody one time, "Are you full of the Holy Spirit?" He said, "I've been filled, all right, and every now and then I leak." Beloved, I speak to you realistically. You may have your moments of awareness, when God is very real to you, and life takes on new meaning. You may have your moments when you lose this. That's why you must remember God's command, you must remain God's obedient servant - - keep coming back, again and ever so often, to holy places, where the lamp is kindled anew, and where your conscience is pricked, where the outstretched arms of God wait to receive you, and then His hand points the way that you are to take.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

May 31, 1964

"RICH MAN, POOR MAN"

We now resume the series of sermons based upon the parables of our Lord. Today's sermon, bearing the title, "Rich Man, Poor Man" is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, and the text is a portion of the 19th and 20th verses of the 16th chapter of Luke:

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:  
And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores."

Make no mistake about it, as soon as our Blessed Lord began to tell this story He had the ear of everyone who was present. The very introduction, you see, intrigued them, for they had in these days, even as they have now in many parts of the world, only two strata in society, the very, very rich, the very, very poor. And those that were there, because they were the poor, their ears were immediately pricked, and they were at attention. And Jesus began to tell the story about two men, one of whom was rich, and the other was poor.

He not only gripped their attention for this reason, but for another reason as well. As the story was unravelled, He spoke not only of the relationship of these men in this world, but He also told about their relationship in the next world, and this is enough to hold any man's attention....rich man : poor man.....heaven : hell. You see, it claims our attention - - whether we're here, or whether we're there.

Why did Jesus tell the story?

Not just because He wanted to give them some idea of what the life to come is like. In fact, you can't find much about Jesus' description of the life to

come from this parable. He simply says it is...it's the world beyond....and there's a sharp division, there's a gulf fixed, people on one side can't get to the people on the other side....they can see each other, but that's all... ..and the one side is called heaven, and the other side is called hell. And that is about all that He told about it. So you see, He didn't tell the story just to give them some idea of what heaven or hell is like.

C And He didn't tell the story just to give the poor man a chance to get his licks in, now, at the rich man.

But why did He tell the story?

O He told the story, it seems to me, for this one very clear reason: that of two men, one of them is consigned to hell. It's always a terrible, terrible thing when a man goes to hell. It is, as you know, the worst possible thing that can ever happen. Now you and I can well afford to take a page from this book. And if it's a negative approach, then let it be a negative approach, but we had better become schooled in the ways by which a man goes to hell, that it should not happen to us.

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Y Why did Dives go to hell? Well, it wasn't just because he happened to be rich.....and the beggar didn't happen to go to heaven just because he happened to be poor. A poor man can go to hell just as easily as a rich man. But because Jesus seems to focus His attention so much on Dives, the rich man who went to hell, we can well afford to do the same thing.

Jesus pictures the rich man for us...clothed in fine linen and in purple.

...good clothing in itself is not a bad thing

He lived in a fine house.

...now there isn't anything particularly wrong with a person living in a fine house

He ate well every day.

...now there isn't anything particularly wrong with a  
person eating well every day

Why, then, did he go to hell?

Again I say, it wasn't just because he was rich. Having wealth could  
have been his opportunity.

C And we have no reason to believe that he went to hell just because he was  
bad. Now be careful with that! -- what do I mean when I say that to you? We  
are not given to understand that he ever got his wealth in a corrupt way, we  
are not given to understand that he stole, or that he devised illegal ways by  
which to maneuver -- we have no reason to believe that he was a "wheeler-  
O dealer" -- none whatsoever.

Why, then, did he go to hell?

P He went to hell, maybe not so much because he was bad, but he went to  
hell because he wasn't good. Now that isn't a play on words. It's meant to  
convey exactly what the words say. It wasn't so much that he was outright  
evil, it's primarily because he wasn't good.

Y What do we mean by goodness? Voluntary outflowing of a man's heart to-  
ward somebody else....a willful, deliberate intent on my part to take what I  
have to give to somebody who doesn't have -- this is goodness -- voluntary  
willful desiring on my part to share my good fortune, whatever it may be, with  
someone who is less fortunate.

When you understand this parable you see there are two parts to it as  
well as there are two men. The one part deals with this world and the other  
part deals with the next world. And it's an amazing thing to note that in the  
next world Dives was absolutely aware of the beggar Lazarus...he even called



him by name...he recognized him. Now this was the sin of Dives, that while he lived here on earth, he didn't so much as fully recognize the need of the beggar....the sin of Dives is that he insulated himself against the need of his brother....he didn't permit himself to become identified, involved, personally and directly. This was the sin of Dives.

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It happens to all of us. This parable speaks to the deep need of every man. For on one way every one of us is rich, always having, perhaps, a little bit more than somebody else in this world. In a certain sense every one of us is poor, poor in God's sight, depending completely upon His mercy and His goodness, His kindness and His grace. But Dives went to hell because he insulated himself against the need of another man. It can happen very easily.

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Once in Guntur in south India, when I was going around the town trying to get something of the feel of the place, my friend said, "And there, this is the residence of the Bishop - - a group of Christians, doing work in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is where he lives" .....a rather imposing place - - it was a fine compound, and a stone wall going all around the property, and a very impressive gate.....and the gate was closed; and on either side of the gate I read this sign in English, also in Telugu: "Mad Dog. Beggars Beware" .....a very subtle way, you see, of keeping the beggar at a distance. For India is the land of the impoverished, India is Poverty, Unlimited....and here is a man in Christ, presumably, who would even keep the beggar at the distance - - "don't let me see him too often."

That was the trouble with Dives - - "Don't let me see Lazarus too often... let him be kept at a distance...let him be out there at the gate...you may bring him there, you may put him there, he can gather up the crumbs that fall from my table...but keep him out there."

We, too, have a way of keeping the beggar at the distance. I sing the

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praise of any charitable enterprise, but one must be very careful lest when he writes a check he knows a measure of satisfaction that even in the writing of the check he keeps the beggar at the distance, that somebody else shall become personally involved, that somebody else shall relate his work to them directly. I was constrained to tell you this when I read the Gospel lesson for the Day, as a prefatory remark...it has been said that it was the reading of this lesson, this Gospel for today, this lesson which serves as the basis for this sermon, it was at the reading of this page of Scripture that Albert Schweitzer turned his back upon Europe and all the prestige that he enjoyed, and looked upon Africa, the heart of Africa, as the beggar at his door...and he left what he enjoyed, and went and identified himself completely, directly and personally, with the beggar. This is the sin that Jesus declares so clearly: Dives.....  
...Lazarus - - and always the beggar at a safe distance.

Martin Luther has a telling phrase. He says, "Hereby is every man known whether or not the birth of Christ is made effective in his heart, if he takes upon himself the need of his brother."

And you're not forgetting, are you, that the same Person who told the story about the rich man and the poor man was also the Person who said, when He was talking about the Day of Judgment.....

"Depart from me. I do not know you, for I was hungry  
and you gave me no bread; I was thirsty and you never  
gave me anything to drink - - "

...and then they came back ever so quickly and said,

"Lord, when did we see you hungry, when did we see you  
athirst, and we didn't give you anything?"

...then it was, you see, that He settled down very squarely and said:

"Whenever any man is hungry...whenever any man is athirst - - "

...and you and I insulate ourselves against them, we insulate ourselves against

Jesus Christ.

I want to close this sermon with a very simple illustration that's as recent as yesterday or the day before, it's that contemporary. And I know whereof I speak. A Dr. Virgil Richardson, from nearby Baltimore, made a trip to Hong Kong. You've heard me tell you about the refugee problem in Hong Kong...hundreds of thousands of them, and the problem is always the same...

...where to live....where to work....what to eat.

Dr. Richardson said he was walking down the street in Hong Kong and his eye fell upon a child, leaning against the window of a bake-shop, the hungry child on the outside, looking through the window at bread which it could not have. And as Dr. Richardson stood there, lo and behold, the child had waited so long that it fell asleep. And he thought to himself, this is excellent - - this will make a wonderful picture. So he took his camera and photographed the hungry child, fallen asleep....and there was the bake-shop, and there was the bakery filled with bread.....

When he came back to the States and he showed his pictures to his congregation, what do you suppose happened? Some sensitive soul came up to him and said, "Dr. Richardson, after you took the picture of the little hungry girl who had fallen asleep at the bake-shop window, what did you do?" And he simply had to answer her, "I went on down the street, and I took photographs of other people in need." This is the commentary against all of us. We may even take note of other people's need!

....how much more wonderful this story could have been....

"Why, I went to the child, and I gently awakened her. When I had taken fear out of her heart, I took her by the hand and we went inside the bake-shop, and I gave her a loaf of bread, and I bought her a dozen of cookies - ".....

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Remarks - Pastor Shaheen

(Made during the announcement period, May 31, 1964)

Usually in the New Member Group sessions we devote an evening to a discussion of the liturgy of the church - - why do we worship the way we worship in a Lutheran congregation?

C  
One of the things that's mentioned is the role of the officiating minister, the person who stands or shares in the conduct of the worship experience. Let me remind you, in case you did not already know it, he serves in a two-fold relationship, and this is expressed in the direction in which he faces. When he has his back to the congregation, he is identifying himself with the congregation and speaks in their behalf to our Heavenly Father. The altar symbolizes the presence of God. And so you might have noticed in our worship experience so far, there are certain times when either of the officiating ministers faced you, or turned their backs to you. When the altar is faced, the officiating minister speaks in your behalf.

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However, for that part of the service when he faces you, he is either addressing you as a fellow member of the congregation, or he is addressing you in behalf of God - - he is either God's spokesman to you, or your spokesman to God.

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Perhaps you noticed a slight change in the service this morning, and that was during the praying of the Kyrie. One of the ministers faced you, and offered you the invitation to pray for these things, so therefore he was looking in your direction. When you prayed, you faced the altar.

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In our worship experience, from Sunday to Sunday, there are any number of things that you might do for yourself as an individual. When you enter the Nave, as an example, and you have your own private personal devotions, when you pray as you find your place, no one suggests the kind of prayer that you ought to pray then.

But once we've begun to worship as a group, there are certain things that are laid before us, certain things as a group that ought to be in our thoughts and in our prayers. That's why in the liturgy of the church there's a particular section given now, to what we ought to pray for, Sunday after Sunday, Sunday by Sunday, and always the same things. And it's made known to us in the invitation to prayer, which is part of the Kyrie.

Some Sunday when you come and you're getting ready for worship...and it's always a grand thing when you're able to be here before the service begins - - no one ought to rush recklessly into the presence of God.....but to use these few minutes before the service begins to go over certain parts of the liturgy and better prepare yourself for participation. You might be in for a good spiritual experience when you read for yourself again the invitation to pray which is part of the Kyrie.

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"THE BANQUET-GIVER"

Today's sermon is another based upon the parables of our Lord. The text, from the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the 15th and the 16th verses:

"And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.  
Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: - "

The introduction to a parable sometimes is almost as important as the parable itself. That may be precisely true this morning. What our Lord told these people was almost dynamite, but He had to say what He said to them, and the introduction to the parable tells why.

Our Lord had been invited to a man's table. It was a very grand and glorious occasion. And I hesitate to tell you this, but I must tell you this, as the evening progressed our Lord Jesus Christ did not behave as a polite dinner guest. He said some things that embarrassed His host, and no polite dinner guest, you see, ought ever to embarrass his host.

Now this is what happened....as they were eating, in all likelihood Jesus looked around, and He must have been much impressed with the fact that they were all decent, honorable and respectable people. And at that point He laid down some rather radical ground rules for arranging an invitation guest list. He said something like this: when a man is having a dinner party, he just shouldn't invite those who had invited him before, returning the favor; nor should he simply invite those from whom he, in some distant time, would like to receive an invitation.....this whole matter of obligation ought not to



enter into it at all, is the implication that Jesus made. And Jesus even went one step farther, and He said, you ought not even to be tied ~~by~~ simply to inviting your friends and your relatives....but if you really want to have a party, and if you really want to do something wonderful, invite those who otherwise would not be invited.

C up to the time that Jesus said this there was fine esprit de corps, and the rapport was exceptionally good. But now this itinerant preacher had to talk like that! ...and one of the guests who couldn't stand anything less than politeness speaks up immediately, hoping to ease the situation, and says,

O "But blessed is the man who is going to eat bread  
in the kingdom of heaven"

P ...as though now, you see, in this comment, he focuses attention on something far, far away ("let's get rid of the embarrassment of the moment now, and surely, no one can find fault with what I've just said").

Y Now because this remark was made, because our Lord had already made the remark that He made, our Lord now is in duty bound to say to him:

"Well maybe that's what you think -- maybe that's what everybody thinks--that everybody's going to be thrilled to high heaven to eat bread in the kingdom of God, but let me tell you something -- "

...and then Jesus took the wind out of this man's sails, and said:

"There was a man who had a dinner party -- you can call him a king if you want to. He made a marriage feast for his son -- you can call him a rich man -- who invited many, many people. Now you think that because he was



having the party, and he sent out the invitation, that everybody would come, and that is what you've just implied.

But they didn't. The invitations were received - - "

C (now I must tell you this, in Oriental times, when a man gave a dinner, he set the day weeks in advance, but because of a number of different reasons, he wasn't able to set the exact hour -- circumstances might arise over which he had no control as to the precise time.....so the day was set, but when the table was spread, then he sent out his messengers and he said, "Now is the time that you come")

O ...so our Lord, in the telling of this parable, says that the invitation went out, the invitation was accepted, but when the time came to appear, each one having been invited began to make excuses....

"Now what do you think of that, my friend, you who just said it's going to be a wonderful thing to eat bread in the kingdom of heaven - - "

P Well if I tell you this story, I'm also telling you that that's the way it is between God and us. God is the great banquet-giver. Whatever understanding you have of God, include this in your understanding - - He is the gracious host. God spreads the table and God is always saying to us, "Come! Come! Come!" Y ....the first understanding that the Christian has of God is this: that He's kindly disposed toward us.....the first understanding that the Christian has of God is this: that His arms are outstretched to receive us - - He's always doing the inviting -- "Come! Come! Come!" Even the old Jew knew that this was a wonderful thing to be said about God because in one of the Psalms he said, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." So God is the great banquet-giver, God is the gracious host, God's always saying, "These good things I prepare for you,

not because you deserve it! - - but because I happen to be the kind of God that I am"

...and then you and I would think that everybody would flock, everybody would want the good thing that God has to give, but no less an authority than Jesus himself -- He says the facts of life just don't prove it out...when the time comes, there are many who will not appear, there are many who make their excuses.

The parable does two things for us at least:

It gives a picture of God, the banquet-giver; it also gives a picture of ourselves, the ones who are invited and who are asked to come.

Now for the moment let us look at these people and the excuses that they gave. Each one of them, I submit to you, is a valid excuse. Each one of them was given for a good and honorable reason. Our Lord never said that a man should not be very careful of his business dealings...our Lord never said that a man ought not to protect his investment.

So you see, this man was within bounds, perhaps, when he said - -

"Business matters are important - - I have to go

out and see this field that I have purchased - - "

"I have got to look over these oxen - - I've got to

make certain that I wasn't short-changed - - "

...well a man ought to exercise good business acumen. There's nothing wrong, as such, with that. And even though you smile when the Scripture is read:

"One man said I have married a wife and therefore

I cannot come"

...you have to understand Oriental custom. In that day, a man who was married was given a full year in which he was not responsi-

ble for military service, even the government itself said, your first duty is to establish your home, your first obligation is to your family.....so the man was perfectly right, you see, in saying,

"I have an obligation, I have a responsibility."

C But why, then, does Jesus tell the parable? And why, then, did Jesus end the story by saying: "Everyone who gave such an excuse and who did not come will not be given an invitation. I shall keep them, now, from my table."

O And the answer is a very simple one to that question. As far as God is concerned, He's always challenging us to the priority that He places upon us; and the tragedy in life is not that you and I make choices between what is downright evil against that which is good, ah, no! -- you and I don't do that ...we're fortunate enough not to be that far down the ladder.....the choices that you and I make are never between that which is terribly, terribly bad as over against that which is very, very good....

P Y But the choices that you and I for the most part make are the choices between what is good and what is far better! ...and in the final analysis, everyone who refused the invitation to the banquet table did not attend because he felt that something was more important, he was pre-occupied, and he gave his attention to the business at hand.

Now as I understand the mind of Jesus, this is the crucial part of this teaching;

...there comes a time in every man's life when he has to make  
a choice between what is earthly and what is heavenly

...there comes a time in every man's life when he has to make  
a choice between what is convenient and what is absolutely  
necessary

...there comes a time in every man's life when he has to make a choice between what he is personally inclined to do and what the full thrust of God claims upon his heart This, precisely, is the teaching of the parable as I understand it.

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Now you're not forgetting, are you, that every single one of these accepted the invitation, but when the time came to appear they didn't show up. This is parabolic for you and for me and for many people. We're all in favor of God, we're all in favor of the kingdom of heaven....and who among us right now, when he dies, doesn't want to go to heaven? You see, we reflect something of the spirit of these people who accepted the invitation far in advance of the actual day -- they accepted because they thought it was a good and a fine thing. When the time came to turn their backs upon the immediate pressure, the immediate concern, and to give their host their undivided attention, they were not ready.

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This is a parable, not about the unable, it's the parable about the unwilling.....it's a parable, not about those who have no interest in the Kingdom, it's a parable about those who have no interest in the Kingdom now. Was it a sermon or was it a book -- it had the very good title: "Thy Kingdom Come -- But Not Now!" God has His own way of saying "Now.....or never." You don't like to think about it, and neither do I. Quite frequently we allow ourselves the thought that "whoever will may come" also implies whenever you want to come. But this parable doesn't allow for so great latitude.

There's a very damning thing about human nature, and that is we always want so much that's good on our terms, we even want God on our terms. There are those who say "I'm in favor of God - - I'm in favor of all the things for which God stands, but let me have God in my own good time." Don't misunderstand me, I'm always grateful when any man turns to God...but it's risky business for

C a man to think, "In the meantime, let me take care of these matters...let me get established in business....let me attend to all these other things - - then, God, - - later on - - I'll give you your proper due - - ". Someone has said, rather facetiously and yet quite soberly, "It's a lot easier to think about God and His claim upon you after your second heart attack." The full thrust of the parable is this: that God is talking about a banquet-giver, and He said, "You accept now.....and if you don't accept now you can have no assurance that the invitation will be yours again."

O Was it in the New Yorker? - I'm not quite certain, but the cartoonist sometimes speaks more truth than you might hear from some pulpits.....it's the cartoon of a church that has very, very few people in it on a Sunday morning ....and the one clergyman is heard saying to the other, "During the campaigning season, when the politicians are making their speeches, they have a way of outrunning us in our promises, and what we have to say to the people doesn't have the same appeal."

P You know full well that your Pastor spent a part of his life this past year in a part of the world where the Communist has captured the imagination and the minds and the hearts of men. And one reason, they tell us, why they have been able to make their progress as great as they have is because they kept saying "Something has to be done now! - - Something has to be done now!" ....and heretical as this may seem to you, who knows but that in the plan of God even forces outside the church have been allowed to have their day because we who find our places complacently inside the Kingdom have said "tomorrow." There's also a title for another book, and I have read it, and I have found my conscience pricked, and the title is "Tomorrow is Now".

Y These are the truths implicit in this parable.....you can't have God

on your terms!

...and God won't let you have Him on your terms...

...because there's too much at stake, and you can't trust trying to manage God and His schedule. It's because He loves us as much as He does that He's always saying - -

"Today - - "

"Now - - "

"My way - - - "

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"ELDER SON"

Today's sermon is another based upon the parables of our Lord. It has the title, "Elder Son"; the text is from the 15th chapter of Luke, a portion of this verse, the 25th:

"Now his elder son was in the field - - "

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As any Bible scholar knows, our blessed Lord did not always have an easy time of it when He was here on earth. There was a time in the life of some of us when we found this very difficult to believe or to accept, for some of us remember when we were naive enough to think that love and goodness never would go unrecognized, unappreciated. But the facts of life simply do not bear this out.

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Today's sermon was one of three stories which our Lord told in answer to a group of people who are opposing Him. In fact, at this particular time in His ministry a whispering campaign had been begun. This 15th chapter begins in this way:

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.  
And the Pharisees and scribes murmured,  
saying, This man - - "

..."why, he receives sinners and he  
eats with them - - "

...that's the only way it appears in the Bible. But any student of human nature can read between the lines, and you can hear the whispering campaign...."birds of a feather flock together" .... "you can tell a man by the company he keeps" - - that is what they were saying.....and our Lord knew it.

C He was being rebuked, ridiculed and shortchanged in the minds of these people because He was spending His time with sinners, the outcasts of society, the underprivileged, the ignored, and even (you might as well get it straight in your own mind) - - people who never got around to being as religious as you and I are religious. But He had a way of making friends with them. He had a way of making them believe that they were still important to the Kingdom of God.

O Then that leadership of the church couldn't quite take this, so they were bent on their whispering campaign. But this blessed Lord of ours, never to be caught off-guard, never to be unduly vexed, never to be unduly irritated, quietly and with blessed assurance turned to them and said, "Let me tell you something".....and He told them three perfectly wonderful stories.

P If you were to ask me to name three of the grandest chapters in the Bible, I think immediately I would include in that list of three this 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It's a chapter that has three different stories - - the theme is the same - - the characters and the setting change. The theme of the 15th chapter of Luke is God revealed as a loving, waiting Heavenly Father, who has a continuing concern for the lost.

Y ...So Jesus told them the story of a man who had a hundred sheep, and one of them was lost. And Jesus said the shepherd could not be satisfied until he went out and he kept looking....and the verse, the part of the verse that needs to be underlined in this particular section is "until he finds it." God is like that, who keeps looking and keeps searching until He gets the thing that He's looking for. Said Jesus, there was a man who had a hundred sheep and one was lost - - lost. God has a concern for the lost.....

...Jesus said, "Here's another story I want to tell you. There was a woman who had ten silver pieces...she lost one of them...and she kept sweeping the house and looking for it, and she kept looking until she found it - - - "

...and then Jesus says, when the shepherd found the lost sheep, when the woman found the lost coin, there's great rejoicing.

Then Jesus saved the grandest of all these grand stories until the end.

....."There was a man who had two sons - - - "

Now sometimes you refer to this as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It's not a fair appraisal of the story - - again I say to you, it's the story of the loving Heavenly Father - -

...and of these two sons

...you know, you're familiar with it

...the younger son came and said

....why not put it in plain language!

"I'm sick and tired of home.

I can't stand it here any longer - -

Give me what belongs to me - - "

...so typical of the adolescent

"I can't wait - give me - - give me - - give me!"

And all the sins of youth are the "give me" sins - - always wanting what they are yet unable to fully appreciate

...so the father, with his high regard for individual personality, gave the younger son what he asked for.

And you know how he went out and how he wasted his life, and then when he had

goten so low that there was only one direction in which to look, he heads back home. And always, now, the story of the loving father.....the father runs out to meet him, and claims him - - this bit of wasted humanity. What anguish there must have been in the heart of the father! - - no longer the flush of youth, but broken, wasted manhood.....the father claims him -- not only claims him, but asks merry! -- has a feast.

How wouldn't it be a fine thing if this is where Jesus would have ended His story? - - if He would have said, "The lost came back -- there was a great celebration, joy in that household, even as there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents!"

....master-preacher that He was, and with that unique perception of human nature, it's as though He was saying:

"But hold on - - I have yet something else to tell

you! You haven't forgotten, the father had two sons. Now the elder son was in the field - - "

...now it may have been with the scribes and Pharisees very much in mind Jesus went on to tell this, the last part of the story.

Before I go any farther in this sermon let me make it perfectly plain that what I am about to say now in this sermon is not for the people who are not here. Everything that I'm about to say in this sermon is not for those who have yet to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Everything that I have to say in this sermon I have already said to myself....and somehow I've dragged you into the picture, too.....and be careful, now, with what you do with what I'm going to say.

I'm going to make bold to think of ourselves as the good people, the decent

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people, the honorable people, the respectable people. I can't for the life of me think of any one of you as deliberately, wilfully coming to God one day and saying, "God, I'm fed up with you; I'm going to turn my back upon you, and I'm going to go out and commit my sins -- one sin after another! -- all the sins of the flesh that we've never committed, but we know that people do - - " ...I can't conceive of any one of you talking like that....I can't conceive of any one of you thinking like that.

And because this is true, you see, this puts us automatically in the company of the elder son. If life is to be divided into two camps:

- - the younger son, who is the prodigal
  - ...you don't belong in that group
- - and we like to think we belong in the group who are the good, the decent, the honorable, the respectable --
  - who have never gone out into the far country -- who have not trafficked in the sins of the flesh
  - - this was the elder son.

I'm inclined to think that when our Lord was telling this story He was hoping and praying that the scribes and the Pharisees would listen intently, because this is where they come into the picture. They were the decent, they were the honorable, they were the respectable, they were the ones who kept every commandment of the Lord.

It's easy enough to understand sin when you talk about the sin of the flesh. It's easy enough to understand sin when you talk about licentiousness and riotous living. But our Lord gives us also to understand that there is such a thing as the sin of the spirit....and who knows but what in the sight of God the more heinous sin is the sin of the spirit?

So Jesus said,

"Before you go, my friends, let me talk to you  
about the elder son - - "

He committed at least three different sins:

C The sin of contempt, which is also to be classified as the sin of willingness to believe evil. You may read this chapter for yourself - - nothing at all is mentioned about harlotry until the elder son mentions it....so he held his own flesh and blood, his own brother, in contempt -- "scum of the earth! That's what he is - - a wastrel!"

O The second sin is the sin of self-righteousness....for it was the elder son who was able to say to his own father, "I've kept every commandment -- I've done everything that you've wanted me to do - - "...a kind of self-placement of a halo - - "If you don't know that I'm good, let me tell you how good I am - - "  
P ...that was also familiar language in the Pharisees -- our Lord even told a special parable about that man who even told  
God how good he was!

...the sin of self-righteousness is not the sin of a  
man in the gutter - - it's your kind of sin - -  
Y my kind of sin.

The third sin that he committed was the sin of self-exclusion.

You can read it for yourself. The father was rejoicing at the return of his son who was lost. But the good one said, "I will not go in." He voluntarily kept himself from the overwhelming love the father!

Now all of these are the sins of the good man, a decent man, an honorable man, a respectable man.

You see, what you and I forget is this: that a man does not have to go out



into the far country to get lost. There are people who live within the confines of a family circle who experience alienation -- within sound of one another's voice -- may even share the same bedroom, the same table. One does not have to pack the bag and wander away to become lost.

C John Wesley spoke true words when he said that a man can be saved in church, and a man can go to hell and still be in church. Oh, it would have been a lot easier if our Lord in telling this story would have stopped with the wastrel who came back and was **restored** and there was the joy of reconciliation.....the other side of the coin must also be faced.

O There is a sin of the flesh.....but there is also the sin of the spirit. For whatever comfort it may be to you, this sermon was first tried out on my own soul for size, before it came to this pulpit.

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P (This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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July 12, 1964

"THE TWO FACES OF CHRIST"

The sermon, based upon the Gospel lesson for the day, bears the title, "The Two Faces of Christ"; and the text, a portion of the 2nd and the 5th verses of the 8th chapter of Mark:

"I have compassion on the multitude, because  
they have now been with me three days, and  
have nothing to eat:  
.....how many loaves do you have? - - "

Anyone who has ever had an experience with Jesus Christ will find Him unforgettable. He remains the Rememberable One. So it was for the disciples. For three years He was in their midst. And then as they thought of Him, and as they thought of their every relationship with Him, precious things came back to their minds.

Matthew perhaps thought of Him in this way: as the one with the magnetic, the dynamic personality. For wasn't it Matthew who was seated at the place of custom, and one day he looked up - - and there was God's great Galilean.....and Jesus Christ made a claim upon his soul. Matthew couldn't resist. He left that place, never again to return.

So it was with the big fisherman, Simon...trafficking with his nets, hauling in fish - - and then that day, confronted by Jesus Christ, with all the magnetism of God Himself, he was drawn irresistibly.....

....so Matthew, so Simon Peter -- any others when they might  
have thought of Him remembered Him in this way:  
the dynamic, the magnetic Christ.

And there were those, any number of them, who flocked to hear Him

preach -- this itinerant one, this carpenter's son, this prophet. He proclaimed God's truth, and they never heard such preaching like that. While they were in His presence, invariably you could find someone bowing his head or putting his finger to his lips and reverently whispering the name of "God" .....

...so they remembered Him:

the proclaimer, the preacher, the one who declared the truth.

There are others who when they thought of Him remembered Him as the miracle worker...blind men who could see, lame men who could walk...

...so they thought of Jesus Christ -- this was the face that came to their mind.

There were others who when they thought of Jesus Christ remembered Calvary, remembered the cool of the Resurrection garden. They remembered Him as the crucified, the Risen One.....and then the Ascending Christ.

Beloved, when you think of Jesus, what is the face that comes to your mind? There may be many faces of Christ, and each has its own appeal, but for our purpose this morning, remembering the Gospel lesson for the day, there are two faces of Christ that come clearly into focus. And the one is not in opposition to the other. He is the same Christ, but He may look upon us in different ways at different times.

The first face is the face of compassion -- ah, you caught it quickly when the text was read! -- this is the compassionate Christ:

" - - and having seen the multitude He was moved with compassion, for He said, they have been with me for three days and have nothing to eat, and they will faint of hunger on the way because many have come a great distance - - - "

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Whenever you think of Jesus Christ, begin at this point: He is the Compassionate One. He came to us out of the very compassion of God Himself. The very reason for His being is this: God is love - - and God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son - - this is the point at which you must always begin when you think of Jesus Christ as the Compassionate One. Everything that He did, He did because He was motivated by compassion. He is the one who went from place to place, seeing people, and always asking Himself the question, what is their need which can be met by God through me?

You read with all the freshness of one who looks upon the New Testament for the first time, and this too can be your unforgettable picture of Jesus Christ: the Compassionate One.....always helping people....always doing something for people....always meeting a need. And when the last word has been said, and when the last thought has been tucked away in the recesses of our mind, this remains.....

He is the Saviour of all the world

....because moved by compassion, mindful of our sin, this was the need that only He could meet, and He washes away our sin...because He is the Compassionate Christ.

It's not the easiest thing in the world to be compassionate, especially for those of us who live as we live today. It's a big world, and a world of many, many people; and the more of us there are, the easier it is for us to be unmindful of the needs of any one person. You see, that's why a woman could be stalked to her death in New York City, and thirty-five people look on - - out of fear, out of hesitation -- whatever it may be -- out of an unwillingness to become involved ....they let her die. What's one person among

six or seven million, you see?

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It's a big world. You see, this is what the visitor has to say to himself when he goes to India of all places -- four hundred and fifty million people there -- the land of Poverty, Unlimited....and you begin to put around yourself a kind of protective shield, so that the next beggar that you see, the next impoverished soul, makes no demand upon you. That's why, of all things, a bishop of the church in Guntur can keep himself securely behind a great wall, and lest he be interrupted, there's a sign at the gate: "Beggars Beware -- Mad Dog". When there are so many of us, you see, it's an easy thing not to become compassionate for any one person.

The crowning grace of Jesus Christ is compassion. And this is your hope, and this is mine, you see, that when you and I die, or when you and I live each day of our years, He takes note of us as one person, and the bowels of His mercy encompass us.....one person.

Of all the people who were there that day on that hillside -- four thousand, if you please -- who was it? -- it was Jesus Christ who raised the voice of compassion: "There's a need here that ought to be met".....

Not far from the home town in which I grew up, perhaps forty miles, in Benton, Pennsylvania, there was born a man, many years ago. I suppose he's an octogenarian now, and his name is known throughout the whole wide world. He's synonymous with world literacy. It's Frank Laubach, who has done more than any other person to raise the standards, to make people literate. Our friend Wesley Sadler who preached from this pulpit several Sundays ago is an apostle who walks in his footsteps.

But for the moment I'm not remembering Frank Laubach as the apostle of literacy. I'm remembering him as he wants most to be remembered, as a man of

compassion. Do you know what this tall, gaunt man does?

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...he's riding in a bus, or a train, or an airplane...ascending the floors of a building in an elevator...standing on a street corner waiting for an appointment....and always around him there are people. And then he does something. He focuses his attention, his thought, upon one person -- not that wilfully he would cause that person to turn around and look at him (ah, this is nothing but fascination, and it does work!)...but Frank Laubach focuses his attention upon one person, and all the time he is saying to himself as he looks at that person: "This person must have some need in his life -- everyone has some need in his life -- I'm wondering what the need may be in his life that God can meet through me?".....and then of course, soon or late, the person turns around, and then Laubach looks him straight in the eye and he says, "Can I help you?"

...as simple as all that

...and then you and I take a deep breath, and the air we breath is as fresh as spring, to know that somewhere in this world of misery and hatred and competition there are those moved by the compassion of Jesus Christ who count as their only justification for living - - "Can I help you?"

Whenever you think of Jesus Christ, remember that He was motivated by only one thing: the compassion of God - - "I am here to meet your need." The cry of man for the forgiveness of sins ascended to heaven, and God sent Jesus Christ.

But why do the springs of compassion dry up so quickly? One reason may be because we have this impersonal society. The other may be, as someone has suggested, because we lack imagination. We fail to project ourselves into



the position of somebody else, and we become not only impervious, but we become blind to their need. What you and I ought to pray for occasionally is the gift of imagination, that we might look at life through the eyes of somebody else.

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Dr. Henry W. A. Hanson was at one time the President of Gettysburg College. He used to delight in telling the story that I'm about to tell you now. If I remember it correctly, he and an architect friend had business in a certain section of New York City, in a rather undesirable part of the city, and yet that's where the wood-worker had his shop. For a number of different reasons they had to get there early in the morning, and they found themselves, shall we say, in the slum section of the city, early.

And the only person in sight was an old bedraggled woman, bent, of course, by the years, and over her shoulder a burlap bag. She was seen stooping here and stooping there, picking up something from the gutter. Dr. Hanson, with his inquiring mind, said to himself, "What gives?" ...and to his friend he said, "What do you suppose she is doing?" Neither one had the answer, of course, until they got close enough to find out for themselves, and they saw her picking these things up from the gutter and putting them in her bag.

And Dr. Hanson says, "I'll give you a dollar if you'll tell me just what you're doing and why." By this time he could have seen for himself, but he did not know why.

And the old lady said, "You want to know what I'm doing? You know what? ...last night there were men and women on this street, and they were drinking, and some of them dropped their bottles here in the gutter. I'm picking up these fragments, these broken bits of glass, because, you see, not too long from now this street will be filled with boys and girls playing, because this

is their only playground....and I'm trying to save their feet from the bruises and the cuts that they might get."

...and that's all she said, and walked away.

And Dr. Hanson and his architect friend stood there, still clutching the dollar in his hand. And the lady went on her great task. It's a big city, and a lot of people, but she for one projected herself into what was going to happen on that street, and made herself a part of a healing ministry.

Maybe this is what you and I ought to pray to God for more and more....

"Open my eyes, O God, that I may see the need of  
others that can be met in your name through me."

Now when you think of Jesus Christ, remember Him as the Compassionate One -- this is one face that He shows to us.

And then also this other face.....and it's clearly seen in the Gospel lesson for the day -- now not the face so much of compassion as the face of challenge. For this God whom we love, this God whom we serve, will not forever do things all by Himself. There are some things that God may see fit to do by Himself, but for the most part, He much prefers to get you and me involved into the thing. And that's what you have to read very clearly and distinctly into these words, as He turned to the disciples who were there and asked....."How many loaves do you have?

"What will you contribute?

Let me challenge you to meet this situation!"....that's the second face of Christ, if you wish -- the Challenging Christ:

"What will you do?

...now....

...where you are...

...with what you have?"

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The surprising thing about life is always this, that no matter how little we may have, it's always enough by which to begin. Someone once asked Socrates how one could get to a certain sacred mountain. And Socrates simply answered, "You take your first step now, in that direction, and make every step thereafter count in the same way." ....you take your first step now! The Compassionate Christ now becomes the Challenging Christ, and He says to the disciples....

"How many loaves do you have?"

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It's a precious thought, I tell you - - love always has enough by which to begin.

As you know, your Pastor was in Pittsburgh this week attending the sessions of the Biennial Convention of the Lutheran Church in America. One cannot sit there in a detached manner when the work of the Kingdom as God trusts it to us is at stake. One knows a measure of delight when he learn of the Compassionate Christ at work through us and our witness.

And then I thought to myself, with the responsibility thrust upon me as your Pastor: what role are we fulfilling in Christ's name?...as the challenge of the present hour is placed upon us. And I had moments of satisfaction, I tell you honestly, when I thought to a degree of your witnessing on many fronts. And if there was any incidental moment of vanity, it was quickly blown away because of the greater good that remains.

This sermon comes to you this morning to remind you of the unforgettable Christ. He may have, if you want to use the expression, many faces. But for our purpose this morning, paramount is His look of compassion.....and then the challenge in His eyes when He happens to look, as He does and will, at you and at me.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE FATHER HAD TWO SONS"

The sermon today bears the title, "The Father Had Two Sons"; and the text is from the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, and it's the 11th verse:

"And he said, A certain man had  
two sons: -- "

It's Helmut Thielicke, the distinguished German theologian, preacher, teacher, who has the unusual thing in our day of being able to preach to overflow congregations, not only on Sunday of each week, but on Thursday night as well, in his city of Homburg. He has written a book that deals with the parables of our Lord. On his opening page he has this to say: that one day he observed the tiny tot of a son of his standing before a mirror. The little boy was absolutely fascinated at this thing, this creature that he saw in front of him. And then there was a startled look on his face when it dawned upon him that that person in the mirror was he! Thielicke goes on to observe -- that's one reason why Jesus Christ spoke in parables, to give us a picture of ourselves; and that in essence every parable that He spoke is a parable of life in which you and I are the characters.

Thielicke could also have gone on to say that every parable spoken by Jesus Christ gives an unforgettable picture of God, gives to each of us some kind of reflection of the image of God as He is. This, it seems to me, is most certainly true in what is one of my most favorite of all the parables. It's one of three, by the way, that you'll find for yourself in the 15th chapter of Luke; and I'm wondering, when it's all said and done, if there's any chapter in the Bible that's quite as grand as this one, when it comes to

Jesus Christ in His teaching.

The 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke begins with the account of a man who had a hundred sheep, and he lost one of them, and he could know no measure of content or satisfaction until, at the risk of his life, he had gone out and brought back the sheep that was lost.

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The second of these three parables deals with a woman who had ten silver coins, and quite accidentally she lost one. And she turned the whole house upside-down, inviting every member of the family to be part of the search, and knew no measure of satisfaction or content until she had found it.

And then, as though our Lord was building up to something extremely great, He said ....."There was a man who had two sons - - "....you know the story. And in the telling of that story He uses these precious words when the wanderer had returned:

"This my son was dead, and is alive!

He was lost, and he is found."

...and there was rejoicing in the house because of this.

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To take our page from Thielicke we ought to see ourselves in this parable, if we are to profit fully by it. Let me tell you what happened the other week at Mar-Lu-Ridge when we had our camp up there. It was my good fortune to conduct the Bible study sessions. We dealt with the parables of our Lord. We spent two and one-half days on this 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It was only on the next-to-the-last day that I made bold to suggest to the class that they be divided up, some fifty of them, into little clusters of five, and then they were given fifteen minutes, and they went out, found their places on a rock, underneath a tree, in some



sheltered area, and searched their hearts as they took seriously their assignment. And this was the assignment: who are the characters in this parable that deals with the father and the two sons.....who are they?....  
...why did they do what they did?....and of the three, which one would you rather have been?

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And then they came back. Each little cluster had a representative who presumed to speak the mind of his group. Bless their souls, one two, perhaps, out of the more than fifty, had the wisdom well beyond their years to say that of the three characters they would like to have been the father. Be charitable with them -- you can't expect too much from those who are young...perhaps you wouldn't have been wise enough to have chosen the part of the father.

But the surprising thing was this: a greater part of them sided with the younger son, the prodigal. There is something about the prodigal that appealed to them. And then, you see, I had my shock -- that they should choose the wastrel! It was not only the teacher but also the pastor in me that felt in duty bound to press the matter...."just why would you want to have been the prodigal? -- because that's what he was, this younger son." Well maybe they couldn't fully understand the meaning of the word prodigal.

But as the session went on I was able to ascertain what I am telling you now. The younger of the two sons appealed to them because there was adventurous blood coursing through his veins. And in all who are young there is adventurous blood coursing through their veins. It's only as we get older, you see, that we're hesitant to try the untrod path, to pack up our bags and venture into the unknown; but it's while we are young



that we have no familiarity whatsoever with the peril of the unknown, that we are daring enough, and albeit reckless enough -- but their word for it was courageous enough, to go out and to chart one's course for himself.

It was good to hear them speak this way. It was better to hear one of their number say this (and he, too, perhaps, with a bit of wisdom beyond his years)...."But don't forget, if it took courage to go away from home, it took a greater measure of courage for the fellow to come back!" ....and then I began to feel unusually proud of them, because it did take a great measure of courage for a chap to come back and say, "I have sinned; I am unworthy."

And then, too, as they talked it occurred to me that they were pleased with the prodigal son because it was only as he came back that the story had a happy ending. And you see, this is true for each one of us -- we always want the happy ending bit. And this brought them a measure of delight, to know that the wandering son, returning, brought joy into the old man's heart.

I stand before you to remind you, however, that the father had two sons. And maybe there's something inside each one of us that easily prefers the younger of the two sons because if we had our way this is what we would have done. Who among us has not known his frustrations? Who among us would almost give his right hand if he could change his scenery-- get out somewhere where he's not known -- be free from all the inhibitions thrust upon him by the restraint of those who have disciplined him? Maybe we too would have chosen the part of the younger who became the prodigal.

It's not for us to pit the one against the other, but I say this as carefully as I can.....if they would have pressed me for it, and if they

would have said, "Pastor, where would you cast your lot?".....and I would have said, "Why, of course I would want to have been the loving, forgiving father." .....and then they would have said, perhaps, "But what of the two sons -- which, now, of these two?"

...who knows but what I would have sided  
with them...

....for the simple reason: the easier of the two ways of sinning was the younger son's, the wanderer, the prodigal.

And you and I do not readily see ourselves as, if one dare say it, the worst of the two -- the self-righteous -- the do-good elder brother who stayed at home. The father had two sons, and both of them were a strain upon his heart; and the elder brother was also the prodigal, for to be a prodigal is not simply to go off into the far country and to squander.....  
...one may also waste by lack of appreciation...one may also be alienated from those who are near and dear to him, whose very bed and board he may share daily. It's a sad thing that the story has to end the way it does when it goes on to talk about the elder brother, because he put the damper on the whole thing, and yet, his is the kind of sin against which I would warn you!...even as I've warned myself.

For chances are, we may not pack up our bags and go out into the far country -- we may not have that much nerve! But stay at home we will....  
..and each day go to the same table with full and plenty, and yet fail to appreciate the unending goodness which is ours. One can see it a thousand times each week....

...let the traveler go to distant parts, let him cross the ocean's waves....where is the sensitive soul who does not return to America trying to check back the tears in his eyes when he

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sees again the Statue of Liberty? - - "My America! This good land!"....and yet always ours, day by day.

....where is the person, who upon recovering from some illness does not begin to appreciate all over again the uncounted hours and days and weeks of health and strength?.....which he took for granted - and almost ungratefully so.

....where is the person among us who has spent perhaps a week in the camp of the atheist, the agnostic, the infidel, and sojourned with him....and then come back to a people like you, who know Whom they believe and are persuaded He is able to keep that which we commit unto Him against any day?.....yet this is always ours.....

..The love of God.....the hand of God outstretched to you, which is never empty. We never appreciate it to the full, and what is more (brace yourself, my friend) what is more, for those of us to see the wanderer return, the person we know who has been the rebellious one, who has squandered, who has committed every sin in the book.....who knows but what we do not envy him at times, that we, too, might have had the fling that he had. But he returns. Where is there joy in the heart of you, my friend, when you see this happen?

Discretion does not permit it, but I wish I could share with you a page out of my own family life known to some folks back in the hills of Pennsylvania, when a repentant one did return to the whole congregation of elder brothers, self-righteous....and with complete honesty he longed for the days of the far country, where at least there was some degree of acceptance.

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Now this leads me to the third of the three characters: the waiting, the forgiving father. He's the hero in this story. He's the one who had two sons, and both of them were alienated from him, for each of whom he had nothing but constant love. Says Jesus, this is what God is like! He can't remit your punishment, make no mistake about it! -- every man pays a price for his sin.....and some day when I get the chance I must tell that group of teenagers what a miserable thing it was that returned -- how the pink of his cheek was no longer there, and how his body was diseased, and how he had to forever live with the memory of a wasted life.....even God can't remit the punishment that a man's sins bring down upon himself.

But God waits, to restore a relationship -- to accept, not a saint, but a sinner, and to say, "All that I have and all that I am remains yours." This is what our Christian God is like.

The old revivalist of a generation or so ago invariably would tell this story in one of his sermons. Don't let your cursed sophistication keep you from appreciating it -- you can well afford to hear it, if not again, then for the first time: A gentleman observed a man opposite him on the train. He didn't know that he'd ever quite seen anyone as nervous, and certainly as jittery. He was constrained to engage him in conversation: "What makes you so nervous, my friend?"

And then he confided to the stranger across the aisle...."I ran away from home and I have been a bad chap....and then I decided to come back home. I know what I've done to my father and I know the kind of person I've become. I wrote home saying I'd like to come back, and I told them I'd be coming back on the train....and I didn't want to come back to them unless they wanted me to come back, and I suggested they give me some kind

of signal - - that perhaps they'd tie a bit of white cloth on the apple tree on the far end of the orchard, and as the train approached the station I could see for myself, and if it was all right in this way, I'd get off; if not, I'd stay on the train and I'd go on."

Within a minute after that the train approached the orchard.....and there wasn't a bare branch on the tree - - there was a shred of white from every branch!

....that's the kind of God we have....waiting to

re-establish a relationship with outstretched arms...

....waiting.

....if He weren't like that, it would be Hell for every one of us.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"A MOST DISABLING SIN"

( - - the curse which is worry)

The sermon bearing the title, "A Most Disabling Sin" is based upon the Gospel lesson for the day. It's the 6th chapter of Matthew, and a portion of the 25th verse:

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about  
your life - - "

It's a wonder that they ever came back to hear Him again, for this was not popular preaching. You must recognize at once not only what Jesus said, but the background against which He was speaking. These people who came to hear Him preach were impoverished people. In all likelihood, for the most part practically all of them did not know where the next meal might be coming from. In truth, the greater percentage of them were people whose only clothing they possessed was the clothing they had on their backs. They were also people who were in bondage; the occupying authority had come and taken over their land. And to these people an itinerant carpenter's son stands up as a preacher and He says:

"Don't be anxious.....don't worry."

He talked to them about the Kingdom of God, and of course He talked to them about the promise of Heaven....and it's just at this point that the godless ones, including the Communists, say to us, "Aha - - you'll get pie in the sky by and by, Christian - - and all this to people who didn't even have bread!" ...that's why they've come in and done what they have been able to do so quickly. Well you see, it's small wonder that Jesus ever got them to come back to hear Him preach again.



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And it could well be, my friend, that you who are now called upon to give attention to this text may wonder whether or not you want to give it hearing. The curse which is worry? You worry, don't you? Some of you have come to know me well enough to know, believe as I believe, that these graying hairs of mine are not just the result of increasing years. And you and I have lived long enough to take certain people to task just because they don't worry. The undoing of certain people lies in the fact that they don't concern themselves enough with things for which they ought to have a concern...

...that neighbor who lives down the street from me, perchance...

look how his property is deteriorating...why doesn't he worry about the fact that his lawn goes uncut?...the place looks so unkempt, it degrades the whole neighborhood...but he doesn't seem to worry about it, does he?

...who among us cannot think of the alcoholic...and he is exactly as he is, we say, because he doesn't worry about himself and the hell that he unleashes for other people

...and some of us go to bed at night with a heavy heart because we think about the people who are Hell-bound - - the bold sinners who don't worry at all about their salvation and seem to enjoy every day that takes them closer to Hell.....if only they'd worry about their way of life

...and then there are people who can't sleep at night, honestly now, when they think of injustices in this land of the free...and they condemn many people for not even giving it a second thought....

I have little time for those who belong to the "peace of mind" cult - - who

simply say that all you have to do is put your trust in the Lord and everything works out all right, and don't you concern yourself in the meantime.....I have been a pastor long enough to know that on occasion the healthiest thing that some people might ever do would be to allow themselves a sleepless night in which they are haunted and vexed and danned by their sins, rather than reach for this thing and that thing to cloud their minds and pacify their hearts.

C But I cannot deny the fact: this itinerant preacher did say that worry is a sin and it is a curse. And He did say very boldly, "Do not be anxious."

O Well what shall we make of it? When does worry become a curse? When does worry become, of all the sins, perhaps the most disabling? It all depends on what you worry about, and it also depends how you worry. Worry you will, and I don't think I'd give two cents for any person who doesn't have his sleepless night occasionally. Whatever else Jesus Christ is saying, He's not saying that we ought not to take life seriously. He is the most serious person who ever lived, and no one could ever spend five minutes in the company of Jesus Christ without being introduced seriously to the eternal verities of life....He was always bringing people into grips with the fact of Heaven and Hell; and of all the things in life, these are the most serious.....He was always talking to people about the lack of love; and of all the things that a man might need in this world by way of equipment, this is the most essential. When Jesus starts talking about worry, He isn't saying that you're not to take life seriously. But when you read what He says in what serves as the Gospel lesson for today He's making plain to us how we ought to worry and what we ought to worry about, and what we ought not to worry about.

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I haven't come here this morning to give you six easy steps to peace of

mind. I have come to call your attention to the words of our Lord as recorded in this Gospel lesson. Let us begin.

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For one thing, He said a man should not worry about the things in this world that he can touch and that can guarantee him, falsely, a measure of security. That's why He said, "Don't worry about what you're going to eat, don't worry about what you're going to drink, don't worry about what you're going to wear"....for the things that matter most are not the things that you can touch, the things that matter most, eternally speaking, are not the things that you amass in barns or in safe deposit boxes. But it's precisely at this point that some people do most of their worrying, whether it's the fortune they will never make, or the fortune, once they've made it, that they might lose.

A number of years ago the United States Public Health Service issued a statement in connection with the prevalence of nervous diseases and the tendency of worry to weaken and to shorten life. In that statement there was the following observation, no doubt suggested by the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel for today:

"As far as is known, no bird ever tried to build more nests than its neighbor; no fox ever fretted because he had only one hole in which to hide; no squirrel ever died of anxiety lest he should not lay by enough for two winters instead of one; and no dog ever lost any sleep over the fact that he had not enough bones laid aside for all his declining years."

Worry becomes a curse when you attach far too great an importance to the things of this world that could be lost. The worst thing that Jesus Christ said about worry is that it undermines our faith in God. That's why He spoke so strongly against it. He even went so far, as you know, as to say that it's characteristically heathen. Of all our sins, none cripples in the way that worry does because, you see, it magnifies our inadequacies and it minimizes the all-prevailing will and power of God.

So then, Jesus goes on and He lays down two guide rules. First of all, He said to those of us who are going to worry, "If you must worry, always include God in the picture" - - His dignified way of putting it was, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God - - "

..."concentrate upon that! ...keep thinking about that! ...never put God out of the picture."

Now what do we Christians think about God?

We believe Him to be good. We believe Him to be great. And we believe Him to be gracious. This is the kind of God we have, and if in sober moments of reflection we review our past we know full well that God has never brought us harm to our souls, and whenever we began to trust Him there was always a way. Anyone who has ever taken God seriously talks like this! So Jesus laid down the ground rule books: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God - - "

...the things that belong to God's kingdom, and whatever you need will be yours....

He has a way of equipping us who say we are His servants and His followers.

And then the next thing He says: "You take one day at a time." Now you thought somebody else said that, didn't you? You have been echoing and re-echoing it for years. This is why He says, as the Gospel lesson comes to a close, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."....

...don't worry about tomorrow - - "

To be quite frank with you, God always holds us primarily responsible for the present moment. For it's now, you see, that life can always be taken away from us - - right now! The only thing I really have is the present moment. God says, concentrate on that. And then you bring to bear against the present moment

everything that God has allowed in the past, and as far as the future is concerned - - that's why you concentrate on the present, because the future is made up of today...and a hundred todays!....

...."and as thy day is, so shall thy strength be - - "

....this is the kind of God we have.

I am not saying that you won't worry - - it would be downright hypocritical of me to tell you that. Worry you will. But what is it that you worry about? And how is it do you worry?

Let me close by telling you that if a man really wants something to worry about, he ought to worry about his sins. He ought to worry about the fact that he could go to Hell. For man is by nature sinful.

But the most precious of all things is this: even here God says, "And I've even taken care of that for you. I have sent my Son into the world to be your Saviour - - believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved!"

...."though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow"

...this is the kind of God we have.

So in the meantime let me trust Him and constantly concern myself that I should trust Him as much as I should.

Some twenty years ago a book was written called "Peace of Mind." - - the author a Jewish rabbi. He went to a friend of his and he said, "I have now decided that these are the things that a man needs most if he is to live, and to live wisely and to live well." And then he listed all the virtues, and he was quite proud of himself; and he took them to this elder brother, who read them slowly and searchingly.

And then he said, "But you've missed the most important thing. What a man



needs more than anything else is peace of mind."

This is what you and I have been thinking. This is why Jesus Christ said to some anxious people, "Don't worry in the wrong way, and don't worry about the wrong things."

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Last night I put through a long-distance telephone call to a widow who has been facing life very bravely these past four years; for it was four years ago last night that the man of her heart, the beloved physician in the village, sat down in his chair and made his exit from life immediately, so sudden was the heart attack. She wrote me a letter this week. She simply says, "These four years do nothing but keep as vivid before me that terrible night as though it happened yesterday...and each succeeding day has been struggle and strain."

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I spent some time with that precious family this summer on vacation. I call it an ideal family, so bravely has she carried on. And then I quoted for her these words by which this sermon ends, and without further comment:

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...to trust in the Lord one learns the supreme lesson  
of life, that one can bear the unbearable, that one  
can do the undoable and when one comes to the  
breaking point he doesn't have to break!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



"IN EVERY PANG THAT RENDS THE HEART"  
( - the compassion which is Christ's)

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The sermons, for the most part, to be preached from this pulpit between now and next June will be based upon either the Epistle or the Gospel lesson for the Day. Today's sermon as scheduled bears the title, "In Every Pang That Rends The Heart." It draws its inspiration from the Gospel lesson for today, and the text is the 13th verse of the 7th chapter of Luke:

"And when the Lord saw her, he had  
compassion on her - - "

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Today's Gospel lesson deals with a miracle.

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It could be that you could divide people into two groups, those who believe in miracles and those who do not. It could also be that you would not have to go outside the Christian Church - - it could also be that you would not have to go outside this congregation this morning - - in order to make such a division.

There was a day, perhaps, when almost everyone believed in miracles. It was true in the ancient world, it was true during the medieval period, and our Puritan fathers, they believed in miracles.

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But what does one say of our day? We are the generation of the scientist, and the technician, the man who says you can't possible get four without one, one, one - - three and one - - two plus two. We deal with facts. We deal with the things in front of us. And then because science has taken such giant-like strides in our day, we begin to listen to them, and when we do, we cannot appreciate the meaning of miracles as did our fore-fathers before us.

Come now, let me tell you this: in I understand the mind of God at all I

think I understand this, that the first thing that God exacts from any one of us is that we be honest with Him. This is a point at which you must always begin.

So we might say to Him, "God, I understand"

...or, being just as honest, "God, I don't understand."

We could say, "God, I accept - - "

...or, "God, if you don't mind, I have to tell you the truth,

I don't accept it, I can't believe it."

And then God, in all likelihood, will stay and wait, until you do the next noble thing, because once you've said "I don't believe" you can well afford, in His presence, to say - - "But help me in my unbelief!"

That happened once a long time ago to a man, and the grandest thing that his soul ever experienced began to happen from that point on.

We can't possibly do it here - - we're operating under, and I say this reverently, too much structured dignity right now....but suppose I were to have made bold to go down from this sacred desk, take off my vestments, stand right at the pew where you are, look any one of you straight in the eye and say.....

"You heard me read the Gospel less for today - - you remember?

It's about a woman who was leading a procession. She had been widowed, and she had only one son, and the son had died...and they were carrying him off to the burial ground. And then Jesus Christ comes into the picture, and Jesus Christ performs a miracle - - the man who was dead becomes alive!

...and then I'd say to you

"Come now, do you believe it?"

How would you answer me?

Did you ever see a dead man come back to life? Did you ever see a heart that had ceased beating or know of a heart that had ceased beating for a length of time (and this man, you see, had been dead sufficiently long, now, so that you could believe it was a miracle) - - "Do you believe it?"

Then there might be one of three answers.

"Yes."

"No."

"I'm confused, Pastor. My respect for the Bible and my respect for my Lord constrains me to accept it, but somehow, somehow I can't be sure that I do."

...and each one of us in all honesty might be characterized by a reverent kind of agnosticism....

"I'm not so sure that I know."

Well let me say this to you; perchance you ought not to be overtroubled at this point; because in a thousand different ways in the course of a day there are a lot of things happen that you can't understand, that you can't believe, that you can't accept. And I don't know that I would want to worship a God whose every deed and action could be wholly and completely understood by me - - that kind of a God would have no more intelligence, no more compassion, than I.

I would also say this to you, that I have lived long enough to know, sometimes we spend far and give too much attention to skirting around the issue and

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concerning ourselves with the things that we can't fully understand, can't fully explain, when all the while, begging for attention is the cardinal principle that ought to be respected. There are many pages in this Bible that I can't fully understand, and there are many portions of Scripture that I cannot fully explain, either to myself or to you, with any degree of satisfaction, but I shall not allow myself this license of taking this Sacred Book with scissors at hand and cutting out the pages that I can't understand, can't explain, and then, like even Thomas Jefferson, with his noble concept of God, gathered together for himself his own Bible, and ruled out of it completely every reference to supernatural.....I say to you, this is presumption, for any person to attempt to do that, even a Thomas Jefferson.....for in the final analysis there is God, and again and ever so often His way of doing things passes the understanding of man's mind.

So, now, we come to this miracle. What will you do with it?

I accept it, without any hesitation, without any reservation whatsoever, because the God whom I love and the God whom I need must be the kind of God who can work miracles. To know what happens sometimes is not always the important thing. To be concerned primarily with the deed itself may not be the significant matter. The important thing could well be this: why did the thing happen at all?

So now I come to this miracle, and for me the important thing in the passage is not that Jesus Christ came and touched the bier and said to the young man, "Arise." - - I shall not take my pencil and turn to my sacred page and underline these words first.

Nor shall I underline these words, that the dead sat up and began to speak.

But I shall take my pencil and underline, first of all, the words that serve

as the text for this sermon:

"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion - - "

This is the tremendous truth - - that God Himself should be moved to do something! You can understand this, can't you? Or can't you?

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This is what startled some of those people in that day, that's why fear laid hold upon them, because the overwhelming concept of God in the minds of many people in the ancient world was characterized by an element of stoicism, in which, while they believed that there was a God, they also believed that God was so far above us that He could not be moved by our misery and our suffering and our sadness and our sorrow. They characterized their God, those stoics, with the word apathy....and that word apathy means to be made incapable of feeling. And this is the way they reasoned: "If I can cause you to be moved by my misery, and if I can cause you to change your mind, then in that moment I am stronger than you!" .....and they couldn't afford to have a God who could be moved by people.

And along comes this carpenter's son, God's Great Galilean...and with all the excitement He focuses His attention upon a woman, the saddest woman in the lot, the woman with the greatest suffering and misery....and during almost a kind of insult - -

because you don't know this, do you? - - this agrieved widow even had to lead the procession because the ancients said, it is because of woman that death and trouble and misery came into the world, and even in that sad, sorrowful procession through the street, this increased her burden - -

.....and this carpenter's son sees her, and when He sees her He has compassion...

...here is someone that must be loved

...here is someone to whom attention must be given

....here is a need that ought to be met.

C Now get this squared off perfectly in your mind - - maybe you could not, of course you could not, perform the miracle that Jesus Christ performed....but what did Jesus Christ do? He took note of her sorrow, He took note of her misery, He took note of her suffering, and the best that He was able to give He gave.

O Now as over against this you cast yourself. Are you made sensitive to the needs of other people? Are you moved by compassion to do something? And when you are moved by compassion, is it the best that you can offer that you give?

P Now when you talk about all that's involved in a miracle that you can't understand, you've got enough now to keep you busy for a long, long time. For if it's the one thing that this world lacks more than anything else it is compassion. In a world of statistics, in a world of computers, in a world of punch cards - - the old lady in the back hills of Tennessee was more than a hit when she said to the census-taker who asked her "the number of your children, please?" - - "My children don't have numbers, they have names." And in the teeming mass of humanity each of us is hungry to be known for what he is, to have a name, to be a person.

Y The most precious thing I ever heard within recent weeks was spoken to a man who walked into a home where there were four children, and the mother said, "We are so glad to see you come because you make our children feel as though each one in his own right is important, and each one considers himself an object of your love, especially so."

I have been watching with unusual interest what is happening here in the



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Linden Project, on Brookville Road, you know.....some of our members, completely on their own, without any organized effort in the name of Saint Luke Church, but simply as committed Christians, are going over there in that impoverished area, lacking so much, and they're giving their time to help them read, to become acquainted with some of the things that otherwise they might be denied. And one of the members of that group from Saint Luke Church said, "I wish you could go with me when I go into the area. Now they recognize the car, and as soon as they see the car coming they flock out, gather around us." You know what's happening! - - they've become alive to the fact that this is a car that doesn't go through, that this is a car that stops! Here is a person who doesn't sit safely on the sideline, but who identifies himself, person-to-person.

....and if that were not so, you and I wouldn't have any hope of Heaven, because God doesn't save people in the masses. Christians are not the only people who have high and noble ideas of God. But of all the religions, there is no understanding of God that can equal Christian compassion. For the first time in the history of man here was God stooping to our need, identifying Himself with it, and not withholding a single thing, even giving the best that He had.....and Calvary proves the point.

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(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHO HUMBLER HIMSELF"

( - - the necessity which is humility)

The sermon bearing the title, "Who Humbles Himself" is based upon the Gospel lesson for the Day. The text is the 11th verse of the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

" For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Chances are they would not have meant it irreverently, but this is what they might have said when they thought about Him...."Why, the man has eyes in the back of his head" - - nothing ever seemed to escape Him. No matter where He went, He made a kind of mental note of everything that He saw, and as though that was not enough to make them uneasy, they could also admit that He had a way of probing into the very depth of their hearts, seeing, if you please, not only what they did but also what they thought.

It was particularly true on this occasion. He had been invited as a dinner guest. They looked upon Him even as the East would look upon Him today, as an itinerant holy man. Whenever they had the good fortune to entertain a holy man they would give him to understand - - "We're here to sit at your feet - - give us some pearl of wisdom - - give us the good word for the day!"

So they waited. And of all things, He surprised them....because they might have been inclined to think that He would have gone on talking about the encounter that took place outside the gate of Simon's house....

...because as He was on His way to dinner there was a group of narrow-minded people who had accosted Him, watching everything

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that He was about to do, listening to everything that He was about to say...there they were - - perched to pounce upon Him if at all possible...for here was a man in need of a miracle. ...so Jesus turns His eyes from a man sick of the dropsy and He said to this group of die-hards, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day or isn't it?"...and He took them completely off guard, and they couldn't answer. And then Jesus went and healed the man...and when He had finished the miracle He said to these people, "Why, if any man has an animal that's fallen into a pit on a Sunday, on a Sabbath day, won't he go and immediately release him?" ....and to this they were silent.

...but the carry-over of this encounter, you see, was much on their mind and in all likelihood they hoped perhaps that Jesus would have continued and that He might have berailed these selfrighteous people.

But wonderful preacher that He was, He never seemed to spend His time preaching to people who weren't there...

... 'so, if it's a sermon they want, if it's the good word for the day they want to hear - '

...Jesus began to speak, and of all things, He put them, the dinner guests, right down in the middle of His sermon....because He had always a way of being able to relate His truth to the immediacy of the situation. And here's where somebody might have said, "Why the man has eyes in the back of his head! - - nothing seems to escape him - - why, we didn't even notice this!"

And then He reveals to them a kind of candid camera experience. He gave them to understand that He observed the way they came in to the dinner, and

there was a mad scramble for places of honor. They were like that! - as though He had just taken His Polaroid Land Camera and snapped their picture, and then seconds later He says - - "This is you."

- - "What! - we look like this!

"What! - we behave like a pack of animals!- - "

...having marked how they sought the places of honor at the dinner table, He told them this parable.

C He had a way of being polite, of course He did. And He had a way of driving home the truth as effectively as He could, so He said, "The next time you're invited, if perchance you're invited to a marriage feast, instead of a mad scramble for places of honor, let me advise you - - you take the lowest seat. Because I'll tell you what's going to happen: if perchance you should take the prominent place, and then your host sees the special guest of honor that you didn't know was coming, and then in front of all of these people he has to come and tap you on the shoulder and say, 'Buddy, this place has been reserved'....and then, red-faced, you go all the way down to the end of the table, the only place that's left."

P And after He had told them this, He declared these strikingly unforgettable words:

Y "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Now honestly, why don't you ask the question aloud, even as I have asked the question: Why, of all things, did Jesus see fit to talk about this to them? Why didn't He go on talking about the self-righteousness of those Pharisees out there at the gate of Simon's house?

You know the answer, of course you do. Jesus is always concerned with the

truth as it affects us, because we are important to the Kingdom. And He seized upon this opportunity to talk to them the way He did because He was always talking this way - - - this was a cardinal truth that He was declaring in His every relationship, because He had discovered that down deep inside every single one of us there is a proud head that raises itself, and whether we are willing to confess it or not, the most important person in the world to any one of us is myself.

C I am always viewing the world through my own eyes, I'm always looking at anything as it might affect me.....and when I talk this way I'm also talking about you. This is the nature of man....

...my sore thumb, to me, on any one day,

O can be far more real to me, and far more important,  
than a million Chinese starving people....

P Among the precious people that God has allowed me to know, there's a Kirsten Marie Jensen, who spent decade after decade as a missionary to the Lord Jesus Christ in Africa. We entertained her as a guest in our home some years back. And then we asked her to spend perhaps an hour in the afternoon with one of the women in the congregation, because we felt it would do the congregation a great deal of good through this one particular woman, to receive information about Africa, to have her eyes lifted beyond her own horizon. When she came back the missionary confessed, "I didn't make much headway - - all the lady talked about was her bunions."

Y What happens to me, what's real to me, is always the most important thing. It's naturally so. And I don't know how long Jesus was here on earth until He discovered the canker of self, and always the tendency on the part of any single person to make himself the important person in the picture. I know what I am saying is not the language of the world. I also know, as I understand human



nature, that they didn't much believe Jesus Christ when He said "Whoever exalteth himself shall be abased" - - and surely they didn't believe this, when He said "Whoever humbleth himself shall be exalted" ....and people aren't much inclined to believe it today.

For this is the way we think, and this is the way we act, and this is the way we talk....

"If I don't take care of #1, who will?"

...and to our children we say,

"Make yourself known to the teacher - - make always a  
good impression - "

....and the supervisor says to the salesman when he goes out,

"Make sure you're recognized - - let them know who you are - "

....and in the political world, it's always the problem, you see, of the image,  
of getting it firmly implanted, and getting it so implanted that the  
opposition party can't quite discourage it or remove it...

- - making the dent - - this is the language of the world.

I haven't come here this morning to give you certain specific guide rules for the way you're going to behave tomorrow morning, in relationship to your boss or to your prospective customer. I can't quite do that. But as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as one who views you now as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, I am in duty bound to acquaint you, all over again if need be, with the ground rules of conduct in the Kingdom. And I have the word of my Master for it - - humility. It's the priceless virtue of the Christian religion.

For it's opposite, you see, is the vice of pride....the tendency on the part of a man always to think first of himself. Well, what's so wrong about



about this? Honestly now, what is so wrong about it?

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Well, when a man thinks first of himself he becomes competition to God. For a long, long time ago God said "I am number one." I'm not speaking crassly when I say, generation upon generation ago God looked over all the people on the face of the earth, and He took a certain group of people, and He said, "You shall be to me as my people, and through you I will work a blessing for the whole world".....and then one of the very first things He said to them - - "I am the Lord your God - - you can't afford to have anybody else above me - - no one else can come first - - you can't have two number ones." But whenever a man thinks always of himself and how it's going to affect him, he pushes God farther and farther out of the picture, and God as Number One just won't be pushed around. This is why humility is such a priceless thing, why pride is such a vicious thing.

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You don't realize it, my friend, but this is God's world. And God has His best way of handling it. But when you and I think we can handle it our own way then we're in for trouble. Let me give you a simple illustration - - I have written it down in a little notebook that I keep; I can't give you the name of the person, but it's a form of a confession:

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"Once," he said, "I was on my way to commit a sin, and I was inviting temptation - - "

...now you understand that, don't you - - that's the way you and I are built...there are times when we leave the door deliberately ajar - - so he did.....  
...and as he was going on his way merrily to commit his sin, suddenly, like a shot out of the blue, it occurred to him - -

"Am I losing my sanity? Am I permitting myself to believe that

I, now, can pit myself against God? - - when for me, in this moment, the thing that I'm making primary is my pleasure and my sin .....when God in all eternity has been shaking His head

NO ..... NO ..... NO

...and in the committing of this sin I think I can outwit God, because I want my way, my pleasure, my sin - - - "

C ....and when he realized all that, he walked away. And salvation had been set in from that moment on.

O You see, there just can't be a proud Christian. Maybe you can divide Christians into this kind of a category, good Christians and bad Christians - - or some Christians who are good and others who are not quite as good; but there is one distinction you can never make - - you can never say there's such a thing as a proud Christian. For to become a proud Christian is to spell the lie to all that Christian truth is. For the Christian truth is this, that whatever you and I have, it's been given to us, and that particularly true when it comes to salvation. No man can ever stand at the gate of heaven and say "Let me in! - this is what I have done" - - and this should be his only plea. He might be able to say, "By the grace of God this what I have done" - - but the accent is not on what he has done, but the accent is on the grace of God.

Y We're always tempted to be proud, however. We Americans are the most proud people on the face of the earth. Find a group of Americans anywhere overseas, and sometimes their pride stinks - - I talk as a fellow American. We may have the fairest of all the lands on the face of the earth, we may have the healthiest of all economic orders, honestly now; but what have we that we have not received?

For myself, I count two great blessings in this world:

One, the lesser of the two, that when my father, at the turn of the century, with the adventurer's blood coursing fully and freely in his veins, dared to face a new world, he didn't stop off in a central European country, or Europe itself, but came all the way to these great shores. I cherish and prize highly the gift of being an American.

C The second thing, and the most important, the gift of my baptism, the knowledge that I have of Jesus Christ as my Saviour.

What have I that I have not received?

O When in India I was of a people, 450 million, less than 2% being Christian, I kept saying to myself, by what stroke of good fortune - - that this should happen to me! - - - I cannot ever remember when I did not know that Jesus Christ was my Lord and my Saviour.

But this, too, I received.

P How, then, can I be proud?

Y Jesus knew very well that when a man thinks only of himself and keeps talking of his own achievement and his own accomplishment, he crowds God out of the picture.....and God never made any man big enough to be able to stand at the gate of Heaven (notice, to stand at the gate of Heaven) and to say, "Here I am; in my own name I have arrived."

This canker of self raises its ugly head in so many ways, perhaps a thousand times in the course of the day, and we fail to recognize it. I want to close this sermon with what is to me a very interesting illustration - - I heard my honored friend, Dr. Rufus Cornelson, who shared a program with me last week, tell his audience what I am going to tell you now.

Dr. Cornelson is convinced that the Gospel must be relevant to the day and

C must be made effective in the economic and social order. He is on the Board of Social Ministry of the Lutheran Church in America. He turned back to a page in his earlier ministry, when he was shepherding a congregation in New Jersey, perhaps his first parish. And then he thought to himself, that since God is color-blind, there ought to be in his congregation some Negroes, and perhaps there would be no Negroes unless he invited them, and if there were to be Negroes in his congregation, then they ought to be where they could be seen, and because he was as young as he was, he said they ought to be in the choir.

O So he went to a Negro preacher that he knew, and he said, "We have a pretty good church down the street here - - surely you've heard about us. I wish sometimes we had some Negroes in our congregation. Do you think that you could get one of your choir members to come over to us and be a part of our congregation and sing for us?"

P And Cornelson was absolutely startled by the answer that he got from the Negro preacher. The Negro preacher gave him to understand that he detected a sense of pride, - - "You want my members to come to your members? Pastor Cornelson, we don't have very many members, and those that we do have can't sing too well - - we need every good singer that we have that we can keep. Pastor Cornelson, how about a couple of your members coming over to us and helping us where we are?"

Y And Dr. Cornelson says, "I confess to you that I was possessed by an element of pride."

In the sight of God, sometimes a step forward has to be a step backward, and Jesus said, whenever you're invited anywhere, don't proudly choose out the first place. I don't know when we'll ever believe this, because by nature I am sinful, and because I am sinful I am always looking at it through my eyes, but

there's one hope for us: we still have the measuring rod which is Jesus Christ. And whenever a man is tempted to exalt himself, let him go and see if he can stand up alongside Jesus Christ...

...let him see even how far away the shoulders  
of my Lord can be when I go to stand  
against him.

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(Prayer)

O GOD, this is not the first that we have prayed to Thee in this day. Were not our waking thoughts thoughts of Thy love and Thy protecting care? Did we not even thank Thee for this, the gift of another day? Did we not say to ourselves, this is the day which the Lord hath made, I will rejoice in it and in it I will be glad? Let me go to the House of the Lord.

NOW, ere we leave this holy place, likewise we shall go prayerfully, thanking Thee for Thy mercy and Thy grace, thanking Thee for Thy mercy which cannot even be numbered, thanking Thee, O God, even for the way that life itself can humble us, even for the way the unexpected and the difficult can drive us to our knees, and make us aware of our dependency upon Thee.

O GOD, speak now to the deep need of anyone who may be here. If there should be a crushed heart, let there be comfort; if there should be a soul burdened by guilt, let there be the assurance of the divine pardon; if there should be anyone who has been driven here by loneliness, let there be in this hour a sense of one-ness with Thee.

NOW FORGIVE each of us his sin and keep before us the hope of Heaven.  
OUR FATHER.....

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



September 27, 1964

"TO BE TRULY RELIGIOUS"

The sermon bearing the title, "To Be Truly Religious" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is a portion of the 37th to the 40th verses of the 22nd chapter of Matthew:

"Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It's never been made quite clear to me how the Pharisees were able to gather up enough courage to come and put this question to Jesus Christ. You see, very shortly before this, the Saducees had had a round with Jesus, and they had put a number of questions to Him. And as we might expect, Jesus, ever so patiently, yet firmly, puts them in their place, and as the Gospel recorder has put it - - "He silenced them."

Now the Pharisees seem to have gathered courage, thinking that they might succeed where the Saducees had failed; and one of their number is bold enough to put to Jesus Christ this question of questions:

"Master, which is the great commandment?"

Now, the putting of this question is typical of the mind of man. Whether we frequently admit it or not, we do want to know what is expected from us. Most of us like to follow some kind of direction - - this could be one reason why we have a measure of ease, when driving along the highway...there are always the lines of demarcation, because we want to know where we ought to go, if



only for this reason - - we might become impatient with people, then, who get over where we belong, and they don't stay where they ought to be.

C Mankind is interested in asking the question as to what the direction for his life should be because it implies another thing - - it gives him a way out. If he knows what he's supposed to do, then he might know some satisfaction in not feeling himself obligated to do other things. Maybe this is one reason why this question was put to Jesus...."Tell me what you expect of me so I can concentrate on that, and not have to worry about other things, lest I fail to do them."

O So our Lord answered the question.

"You want to know what is the great commandment?

This is it - - - love God.

But there's a second one - - you can't think of

one without the other - -

P And the second commandment is:

You must love your neighbor as yourself."

Y When Jesus Christ gave this definition of religion, He gave the perfect and the most complete definition of religion that man has ever known. For this is a definition of religion that includes both the heart and the hand. And you can't have one without the other, if you want to practice a religion that is acceptable in the mind of God. So maintained Jesus Christ. Whatever devotion we have for God must be expressed meaningfully in service....

...of all the religions in the world, Christianity remains

the moral religion

...of all the religions in the world, Christianity remains

the most practical of religions

...of all the religions in the world, Christianity is

the down-to-earth religion,

...and our Lord spells it out very clearly when He says, "If you talk about one commandment you have to talk about two:

You must love God - -

You must also love your fellow men."

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But for some strange reason, maybe it's because the weakness of human nature puts it this way, we think we can do one without the other. There are any number of people who, if you were to press them to the point by asking the question, "Are you really religious?" - - they would answer in this way:

"I pray every day...

I read my Bible every day....

I support the work of the church, I go to church...

I know that God loves me - - I know that in

Christ I shall be saved - - - "

...but now what's wrong with that?

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There's a very subtle distinction that you ought to note. Everything that I've mentioned thus far is a limited thing - - between God and me. I pray....I read the Bible....I go to church.....I believe that Christ is going to save me. But as you examine that carefully you find it extremely difficult to discover anything that involves another person or a passion for a soul of another person.. ....and this is the kind of religion that some people prefer, their own little corner on God, a religious experience that includes only them in the sight of God.

They have a wonderful feeling when they think about God. This is one reason

why I could never feel much enthusiasm for a gospel hymn which is quite popular in certain circles, not because I feel the tune is a cheap one, but because I feel the theology is bad..."I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses - - " ....and then it goes on, "And I talk with Him...and He talks with me - - "

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...a very selfish kind of religion, in which I think only of myself in the sight of God, and nobody else - - not constrained in any way to go out and turn the world upside-down for Jesus Christ - - nothing, you see, that involves me in the need and the misery of my brother.

Unwittingly, many of us prefer this kind of religion, where I give my heart to Jesus Christ, and I think fondly of him, even as I know His love for me is an exceedingly precious thing.....but you must never, never forget, when they asked Jesus to give the great and the first commandment, He said, "I'll give you one, but you also have to listen while I give you another one:

This is one commandment - - you must love God with all  
that you have - - "

...and in the very same breath He said,

" - - and the second is like unto it, you must love  
your neighbor as yourself."

It must have pleased the mind of Jesus, it seems to me, that when the Gospel recorder was giving an estimate of the life of God's Great Galilean he phrased it this way, "He went about doing good." He just couldn't think of Jesus Christ preaching a sermon, he just couldn't think of Jesus Christ working a miracle for one person, he just couldn't think of Jesus Christ going off, early in the morning, late in the evening, and praying....but the grandest

picture of all that he had for Jesus Christ, at least for that Gospel recorder, was a man who went about doing good.

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Among the full-color transparencies that I cherish from the trip to India is the one that you too might recall. It's the picture of the holy man. I snapped the picture at one of the railroad stations in India. At first I was hesitant to do it because I knew that he was a holy man, and I knew that as he sat there he was thinking thoughts about God, and one just doesn't go his way through life photographing people at prayer....but I was a tourist, and I made the photograph. Colorful -- his saffron robe, the paste used to give the holy designations upon his brow, his face, his chest -- his prayer beads -- and those eyes -- given whole-heartedly to prayer and meditation. There he sat.

I suppose it's a good thing in this world to find certain people who, hour by hour, and almost minute by minute, give God undivided attention, who just don't do anything except sit and think about God. He didn't bat a eyelash as I stood there and took the picture. He sat completely immobile.

And I wondered to myself, is this the thing that's pleasing to God? For round about him on every side was all the misery and all the poverty which is India....and there's no hand stretched out to help. Said Jesus Christ, "You must love God," but in the very same breath He said, "You must love your fellow man."

Now let's look at it this way: when Jesus said you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, this is what He was really saying -- you must give God everything that you have -- you must give God your heart. He must have the first and the last claim upon your life. Now it's a puzzling thing to know that anyone should say, this is the

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first commandment: you are commanded to love God. You know the human reaction...  
..."my parents tried to force me to think favorably of that fellow- " ---- you  
just can't force anyone to love anyone. Love is always the expression of a will-  
ing heart. Now why in heaven's name would Jesus Christ himself say to us, "I  
command you to love God - - with your mind and your soul and your heart - - "  
God knows us, Christ knows us, and that's why He laid this down as the basic  
rule - - - it is your duty - - you are in duty bound to love God, for the simple  
reason that it's quite impossible to love your fellow man if you don't love God!  
And this is why so much of the good that we try to do becomes unproductive, this  
is why, ever so often, when you and I give ourselves to doing good things for  
other people, we become tired and weary and the steam runs out, and we say,  
"What's the use? - " .....for the simple reason that we do not love God as much  
as we ought, and therefore we become tired and weary in well-doing. Jesus  
Christ says you must first love God, and then the love of God, the love of  
Christ, constrains you to do these things.

Make no mistake of it, people are not always attractive, people are not al-  
ways lovable...any parent knows this. Human as we are, there are certain days  
when our children try our patience to the utmost, and if we were not possessed  
by a parent's heart, we would wash our hands and say, "What's the use?"...but  
because we are possessed by parental love, we are constrained to be patient.  
So Jesus Christ says, "This love of God must possess your heart."

I used to serve as a member of the Examining Committee, talking with young  
men about to be ordained to the Gospel Ministry, the high calling of Jesus  
Christ. I used to sit back and reflect upon the type of question that ought  
to be raised, the kind of thing that we ought to ascertain in our own mind as  
to whether this is clearly present in this young man's mind. And I am convinced  
now more than ever that the first thing that ought to be established clearly in



any man's mind who is going to serve his Lord as a minister is this: How much do you love God? - - because soon or late, it all hinges on this.

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You remember what I told you, about the missionary who went out to the South Sea island, and someone, a friend who knew him all the years, said, "Knowing you as I do, how can you possibly go out to those people. During the war years I was there, and I know what they're like! They smell, they cheat, they lie - - - how can you love them?" ....and the missionary replied, "Maybe I don't. But I love their Lord, and He's the one who sends me out."

This is one reason why in church circles sometimes people fall out with one another...the devil that lurks down deep in each one of us raises his head, and no matter how good we may want to be, we have our moments when we are not attractive, when apparently we are devil-possessed, and because you have to work with that person, you've run out of patience because now the person is not as lovable as you once thought him to be. But when you love someone because the love of Christ constrains you, you have a faithfulness without which the Christian Church cannot endure.

Let me put it for you this way - - I don't know whether I've ever heard it put this way before, and maybe you won't care to accept it, but pure religion in the sight of God must be heart and hand. I give my heart to God, but I give my hand to my brother. And my hand must always be extended to him, and it's only because the love of God inspires me that I'm able to keep that hand stretched out. This is real religion. And if you want to know how truly religious you are, just ask yourself the question: how much do I really love God? -- and how much do I really help my brother? That's it! - - - not hinder, not hurt - - but how much do I really help?

I want to close this sermon with an illustration that I heard this past week.



A group of us sat at the feet of a man who was giving us some instruction concerning our witness in the world, the nature and the character of our witness. And he closed as I am going to close this sermon, by telling about a little old lady in Cleveland. She had been widowed and her two children had grown up, moved away, established their own homes. And now she found herself, in all her loneliness, in a apartment.....and the world was going by, and she was left there, all by herself. And then it dawned on her that she was becoming bitter and cynical. And she did what she should have done - - she marched herself off to her pastor, and she said, "Pastor, I need your advice and your counsel. I'm not very proud of the kind of person I'm becoming." .....and with the keen perception that characterized that pastor, he knew a little bit of her situation, and he said, "What you need to do is to turn your life inside out - - quit thinking about yourself, and start investing your life in people, especially those who have a great need." He said, "Why right down in your own street, several blocks away, there's a school for spastics. They've never been able to get enough consecrated and committed help. Why don't you go and volunteer as a helper, to work day by day with these spastics?" .....he said, "But you came for my advice.... ...now listen to me while I give you more advise. When you do volunteer, don't you go just because of the good feeling you're going to get because now you're engaged in some busy activity, even though you may be to some degree entitled to that kind of feeling.....and don't you go and do it just because it's going to take you out of the house.....and furthermore, don't you go and do it just for their sakes - - - because if you do it just for them, you're going to become tired and weary because your efforts will not be as productive as you think they ought to be, and your results won't be as promising as you would like them to be....

.....but if you do it, you do it because of your love for God. That's

the surest guarantee against becoming weary in well-doing...because the love of God will energize you, the love of God will constrain you, the love of God will strengthen you."

If my years have taught me anything, I'm convinced that the only thing in this world that ever has lasting value is the kind of thing that's done out of our love for God. Let Him have your heart.....but give your hand to your brother.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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October 11, 1964

"GOD'S INVITATION TO JOY"

The sermon bearing the title "God's Invitation To Joy" is based upon what ordinarily would have been the Gospel lesson for the Day; and the text is a portion of the 1st and the 2nd verses of the 22nd chapter of Matthew:

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,  
The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,  
And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding - - "

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Come now, when you think of it, you've never seen a picture, a painting or a statue of a smiling or a laughing Christ. There must be a reason why this is true. Maybe it's because we hesitate to think of Him who was the most sin-conscious of people who ever lived as the personification of Happiness. We are most inclined to think of Him as the suffering one, who identified Himself with all the misery of humanity, and then when He thought of life, thought of it soberly, and always seriously. Maybe this is the reason why we do not make bold to paint pictures and to carve statues and to put a smile or a laugh upon the face of Jesus Christ.

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But there could be another reason, and this reason, which could be a likelihood, is a frightening one: maybe there are too few of us who have ever identified our Christian experience as a thing of joy - - maybe that's the reason - - maybe we have skirted the issue of the Christian faith, and we've never known it so completely and so fully that we recognize it as a radiant thing, as a thing which is a joy forever. Maybe this is the reason. Helmut Thielicke, the distinguished German theologian and popular preacher, maintains that you

never really know the Christian experience until you catch its joy.

Now make no mistake about it - - Christ does call us to obedience, and there may be times when we have to suffer and identify ourselves with the suffering of mankind, and this is never a happy thing. But on the other hand, how their faces must have lightened up when He said....

"I want to tell you what heaven is like - - I want  
to give you another unforgettable picture of God - -  
- - listen to me - - "

...and then Christ said,

You know what heaven is like? It's like a king  
who gave a marriage feast for his son, and then  
he went and he invited people to come - - "

This is a parable, incidentally, that has two meanings. You may read it again, this 22nd chapter of Matthew, for yourself, and then you will come face to face with the fact of Judgment...

...this is one meaning of the parable. It's a parable that ends with these words, " - many may be called but only few are chosen- " ...it's the parable that also strikes the note of death and destruction and separation...

...it's a parable with two meanings. One is Judgment.

The other, and don't you dare miss it, is a note of joy, because Heaven is likened to something that God makes available to us just because He wants to give it to us, and just because He's kindly disposed toward us, and just because He is forever gracious.

When I have been in Nazareth I delighted in walking the streets. Essen-

tially it's a boys' town. One seems to find boys everywhere, running in and out of shops, running up and down the streets, running up the hillside. And I thought to myself.....He was like that -- Mary's son -- the carpenter's lad -- did He not run hither and yon, and were there not the moments when something struck Him, and He laughed His heart out? -- surely He must have, when He remembered some good thing, some precious thing...

...and then how His face must have lit up when He said,

"I am going to talk to you again about heaven"

...and His first words?

..."It's like a feast -- it's a banquet!"

And what is a feast? An opportunity for fellowship, a time when you take something that's being given, a time when you can claim something as your very own, only because someone takes the initiative, someone makes the overture, someone writes your name upon a list, and he says, "You - you come."  
...and the only reason why you can come is because he does the inviting.  
For shame upon every one of us, this is a tremendous concert of God, and how we Christians ought to cherish it!

...for some people when they think of God, He's remote, there's always the barrier, there's never any opportunity to know Him, to read the lines upon His face, to believe that He is graciously disposed toward any one of us....

...but the Christian concept of God is that God takes the initiative, God makes the overture, God calls us by name, God beckons to us, God says, "I set a table for you, I want you to come, and the best that I have shall be yours -- "  
....this is what we have been led to believe when we have been baptized, this is what we have been led to believe when we have been confirmed -- this is

what we Christians are always being taught.

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But then why are you so sad-hearted? Why do you go so easily, so quickly, to the valley of despair? Why do your faces look, as one wit one time said, "more like twenty after eight than ten minutes to two"? Have you ever noticed a person falling in love? Something happens....the awareness that in this world there is one person who offers his heart to another person....and when a person becomes aware of that there's a whistle on his lips, there's a light in his eye, there's a spring in his step, there's a song in his heart. Love always becomes articulate - - it must be expressed.

I submit to you this morning, there's always a love affair going on between God and you ...or at least as far as God is concerned. God is always saying to us, "I love you"....God is always saying to us, "You belong to me" ....God is always saying to us, "I give you myself, I give you my heart, I hold nothing back!"

Now this isn't something that we're talking about that's yet to happen. I can understand why a person might be sad-hearted about something when it's yet to be realized, because there's always a chance that he might not get it, there's always the chance that it might not be given. I can understand why people can react, perhaps, unhappily against the fear of not getting something that's being promised. But as far as God's love is concerned, it's not simply something that's yet to come, it's not something that He holds behind His back and He says, "Some day when you come to me I will put out my hand and you can claim it and it's yours" ....Bethlehem is a place upon a map. The birth of our Saviour is a fact in history. We have indelibly written it into our Creed - - "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and on the third day he arose - - "....something that already has taken place. It's something that has been established. It is signed, sealed



and delivered, and constantly available. This is reason enough for the Christian to be rejoicing. It already has happened, and it's happened for you and it's happened for me.

Jesus said, "I want to tell you about the Kingdom of Heaven - -

- - it's a feast - - " - - a good time"

C You know what? For the life of me, I can't always understand why people are hesitant to talk about the Christian religion as a good and a happy thing.

O There's a measure of enthusiasm that we have when we have a date at the movies, generally speaking, or being invited as a dinner guest into someone's home, says Leslie Weatherhead....but when you invite someone to share the things of religion, there's a somber accent in our voices, and almost a sadness in our heart. This ought not to be! For the greatest of all joy lies in the knowledge of God's love. One of the mistakes made by the man outside the faith is to think that Christianity is a call to sadness and to gloom.

P While it is true that the believer cannot but look at this sin-ridden world soberly, it does not follow that he should be a person without hope. The very knowledge of God's love and the acceptance of Christ as your Saviour gives you this blessed hope - - you of all people know this: you don't have to go to Hell. The gift of Heaven has been made available, and you know that whenever you expend any ounce of your energy in Kingdom work we're always on the side of eternal good.

Y I sometimes think, if I were to trade positions on the church staff with any other member of the church staff, whom do I envy, whose position do I covet? (I have been with you long enough that you know I seem to have an equal measure of enthusiasm for any and every area of our work)...but every now and then I wish I had the talent and the skill by which to direct a choir - -

- - hopefully emplanting upon them the thought that we sing because we're happy, we sing because we're free children of God's grace!

Christians of all people should be the most grateful and the most joyous. Be careful lest the devil tempt you to tarry too long in the valley of despair.

C There is another reason for your joy. God is always within reach, and He always has something for you to do.....and only in the doing of God's will is there peace and abiding satisfaction.

This I most certainly believe.

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"THE WORLD WAS HIS PARISH"

The sermon bearing the title, "The World Was His Parish" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is the first verse of the tenth chapter of Luke:

"After these things the Lord appointed seventy and sent them before him two by two unto every city and place where he himself would come."

In the calendar of the church today is named for St. Luke. For a thousand years the devout Christian has remembered the Evangelist on this particular day. If the Church at large should see fit to do this, how much more so those of us in this congregation named for him should give him particular heed. What is to be said about St. Luke the Evangelist?

Well, the very title in itself is significant - - St. Luke, Evangelist - - that means the teller of the Good News. So he was, and so he wanted to be remembered. He was the writer of the Gospel that bears his name; he was also the writer of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. From the Epistle lesson read today you noted that exceedingly precious thing - - he was the companion of a good man....and in all his loneliness Paul refers to the fact that of all the people who were not there, of all the people who had passed him by, and of this person and that person in particular who had failed him, Paul does say, "Only Luke is with me".....and that's a grand and a good thing to say of anybody, that they should be considered a faithful friend, and in the time of a man's loneliness they should be there.

Luke is also remembered as the physician, and in the prayer that was of-

ferred at the altar today, we ask God that we should remember him not only as a physician of the body, but the physician of the soul.

C Today as we remember St. Luke the Evangelist we give him particular glory for having been the man who made much of the fact, even as he recorded it, that the cause of Jesus Christ was meant for the entire world. It's Luke who records for us the fact that Jesus Christ called seventy people, and then with a broad gesture and a pointing finger, said, "Get on your way -- you can't stay here -- you must tell other people what you know - - " ...and from that moment on, if they had not known it before, it was definitely established that the Kingdom of God was meant for the whole wide world...and St. Luke the Evangelist, then, is the man who looked upon the whole world as his parish - - - "Let every-one, everywhere, know that this is true."

P Sometimes we forget....it's the easiest thing in the world for you when you gather together your precious little family, and you have your meaningful family devotions, and when you pray, to think that this, your little circle, is the Kingdom.....and the great temptation to anyone who is part of a prayer group is to find that every now and then they're thinking in terms only of themselves. Y If the Christian religion is anything, it's most certainly this: something that was never meant to be confined to one place and to one person or to one group of people. Christianity may begin at home, as well in your case it should! ...but it was never meant to be confined there. Luke the Gospel recorder reminds us of the world outreach of our Saviour. As a congregation that bears the name of the Evangelist we are in duty bound to keep lifting our eyes beyond our own horizon, no matter what that group may be that limits our horizon.

We recall that most unforgettable of all verses of Scripture, John 3:16. Before you complete it now, let me say this to you: no matter how precious the

thought may be to you, God never said that I have a right to believe that everything has been said when I say to myself, God loves me - - this you most certainly can believe, and this you most certainly ought to be able to say.....but God didn't say it as though this was the only thing to be said. John 3:16 does not say, "For God so loved me .....and troublesome as it may be for the moment, John 3:16 does not read, "For God so loved the church" -- this which is meant to be the Bride of Christ is not the sole object of His love...

....we who count so wonderful a thing our association in the company of the redeemed can never afford so great a luxury as to say God loves the Church.....period.

...but that most unforgettable of all verses of Scripture reads:

"God so loved the world - - "

....and it was for the world that He gave

His only begotten Son, that anybody who shall come to believe shall have the promise of life eternal.

But how is this anyone to come to believe unless he is told? And how shall he be told unless someone is sent to him? And that's the way it all happened at the very beginning. Our Lord called them together, seventy of them, and He said, "Now you go out, two by two - - go beyond the place where you are - - " ....and then as you read what happens in this passage of Scripture for yourself, He charges them to go to the very places where He himself would go and He charges them to do the very thing that He himself would do if He were there.

This must always be remembered, and that's exactly how you and I came to know about Jesus Christ. Somebody told us. You didn't get awake in the middle of the night and have a great moment of revelation, did you, without the aid, without someone being an instrument somewhere? Christians are people always

who are the told ones.....Christians are people always to whom someone has been sent! ...who are always the people who have received - - it's been given.

Now in a very sober moment of reflection I must remind you, however, that while people have obeyed Jesus Christ and have gone even to the uttermost parts of the world, they have not always gone for the right reasons. We must always share the truth with one another...We Christians have not always done the right thing for the right reason.

Sometimes there are people who have taken Jesus Christ seriously at this point and then gone their way, and they've taken the love of God and proclaimed His grace to other people - - only because they pitied them, and this is not the noblest of motives; for pity can lead to condescension, and there isn't a single human being fit to be called a human being who but does not resent the fact that someone above him is looking down on him, no matter how good the thing may be that he offers, and no matter how much he may need what's being proffered. There's a certain inborn factor in every single human being that resents condescension, and yet sometimes in the name of Christ we've gone just because we've pitied them, pitied the poor, benighted folk.

And then sometimes we've gone because we've been so impressed by our Christian culture, and we've equated that culture with our own Western civilization...and we've gone out to other places and we've wanted to export that, we've wanted to make them think the way we think, we've wanted to make them do the things we do, we've wanted to make them live the way we live. This is not the noblest of reasons to drive one man into, of all places, another man's soul.

I say it to you as strongly as I can: when our Lord called these people together, and sent them out, He didn't say - -

"Now you go and change their political way of life" - - no matter



how desirable that objective may be!

...and He didn't say - -

"Now you go and change their social way, their economic order - "

...no matter how superior we may believe ours to be.

Jesus Christ simply said:

"Now you go out, and you love them, and you identify yourself

with their needs, body and soul, so that they can say for

themselves, 'The Kingdom of God has come to us'."

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One of the grandest things I've read recently was that editor's comment in a recent issue of LIFE magazine, it might be even in the most recent of issues, in which some kindred spirits pay tribute to one of their photographic team who was buried not so long ago in Delhi. He was not a Christian missionary, but he was the kind of man who went into strange places and always identified himself with the people as they were, which is not an easy thing to do....

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....as anyone who has been in far-away places, on desert islands, and in lands where impoverishment is an accepted fact for generations, where fear and superstitions stalk on every side....to eat what they eat...to sleep where they sleep... ..to drink their contaminated water...

...yet when he died they came, and the tribute of tributes was this: that they looked upon him as one of their own, who loved them just because of what they were where they were.

When our Lord sent these missionaries out, He sent them to the very same places to which He would have gone, and to do the very things He would have done, and you daren't forget this! This is the meaning of the Incarnation - - God coming to us as we are, God identifying Himself with us where we are, God living the kind of life that we live. One of the shocking things that comes

to anybody who travels in the Holy Land, if you can find places where it is today the way it was in Bible times, to discover filth, and disease, and always the unattractiveness of sin.....and then to say to yourself - -

What! - - was it to this place that God came!

- - was this where Christ lived!

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You've recognized the truth, haven't you already, that these people that Christ sent out went out not because they were invited. Generally speaking, the missionary is never wanted. I think I can say to you, I could be in error, but I don't think there are very many places in the world today where they're crying to us to send the Christian missionary. But to the contrary, in many places a missionary can't even get in. China has closed her doors -- China, a land where less than two-tenths of one percent are Christians! -- had closed the door. Even India, where there has been a St. Thomas group of Christians from way back before the Middle Ages, has closed her doors to the American Christian missionary. Even when I came back to you in mid-winter, if I could have said to you, the people of Saint Luke, that I've come to love --- "I feel at this time in life the love of God constrains me to separate myself from you and to go to India as a Christian missionary, as a Pastor, as an evangelist" - - - I could not go there for a five or a six year stint.....I could go as a visitor.....and generally speaking, the missionary does not go because he's invited, he goes because he's sent, because he's compelled, because he's constrained to share what he knows.

We have worshipping with us today a woman who used to be a member of this congregation while she lived in the area, Maybelle Hosterman Nielson. Twice she went to Liberia as a medical missionary, and those of us who know her know that she went there because she was compelled by the love of God to minister to those people. She looked upon herself as a true missionary, looked upon herself as one who was sent.

You have no alternative, my friend - - that's what St. Luke the Evangelist would say.....as a Christian you're in duty bound to share the good word - - you have to tell it. That's why we have to lift our eyes beyond our own horizon.....

St. Luke would say to us - -

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"You, the members of a congregation who bear my name - - every Sunday when you come to worship, think of the cause of Christ throughout all the world - - lift up in your prayers the missionaries, and know full well that every offering that you bring, a portion of it is translated into life-blood by some missionary far away."

...but then you'd think St. Luke would end his sermon there if he were preaching today, but he might turn around as he is leaving the pulpit and say - -

"But I forgot to tell you something else .....

...the whole wide world isn't way out there.

You're also part of the world where you are...and while you may think in terms of someone a thousand miles away, who ought to hear about the Gospel, ...don't you forget the person a mile away, the person in your own home, the person in your car-pool - - they, too, are in the world, and the Gospel belongs to them as well."

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"THE TRUTH THAT FREES"

( - the freedom of the committed)

The sermon bearing the title, "The Truth That Frees," is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text is the 32nd verse of the 8th chapter of John:

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Now there are some verses of Scripture that can stand by themselves, and stand alone. That most unforgettable verse of all Scripture is one:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

You can read that verse of Scripture anywhere, just by itself, and you'll have the message of the Gospel. It can always stand on its own.

Or perhaps you can take another verse of Scripture, consisting of only three words, "God is love" - - and that verse in turn can stand by itself. You don't have to add anything, and you don't have to look back to anything that's been said beforehand.

Now take today's text, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" .....at first blush, you may be inclined to think that this is one of those texts that can stand by itself. But should you think that, would you permit the suggestion, you are mistaken. This text, to be properly understood, must be seen in the light of its context. You have to go back and read again something that Jesus Christ said before He offered these words: "Then said

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Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; - - and - - ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" .....this preceding verse has to be recognized for what it's worth: it's a qualifying factor in this very wonderful thing that Jesus said about the truth that frees. But He spoke these words only to a particular group of people, people who would be disciples, people who would continue in His way, people who would remain under orders, people who would be a disciplined lot. It is to them, His disciples, that He offers this tremendous truth about a kind of freedom which can be guaranteed.

But you must also go on very quickly to the words that follow. Jesus also said to them, "Verily, verily I say unto you, whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin." If you're going to be made free from something, you ought to know what it is; and if you're going to be made free, you ought to know for what purpose. This is the mistake that many people oftentimes make when they say, "If only I could be free, if only I could have done from this particular situation".....and then they never carefully examine what it is from which they want to be made free, and if they dare be made free from it, and to what purpose their freedom shall be. Jesus Christ said, whoever commits sin! the slave of sin.

Now you know, don't you, that the people to whom this message was first given, when the church was young, were people who for the most part were slaves. The evangelists who went out spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ went hither and yon, and a sizeable percentage of the people to whom they preached were men and women who were in bondage. They could show the shackles upon their ankles, they could show you the handcuffs upon their wrists,

they could show you the scars upon their backs where they have been beaten, even as the beast of burden is beaten. Now these people were the ones who understood these words, "The truth shall make you free," in a sense, perhaps, that you and I cannot understand.

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I have never known what it is to be in prison, that is, under sentence. Whenever I have gone to prison I have always gone as one who, when he desired it, could take his leave and go his course; or I've gone there to conduct a religious service, which is something entirely different from bearing the mark of the prisoner. But I have friends who have been in prison, and one of the choice jewels that God allowed me to know is a woman that I met in Paris a number of years ago. I last saw her about a dozen years ago. We had dinner together.

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And I asked Mme. Marguerite Marie Chaldouffois(?) to recite for me again her experience in prison. A brave and daring soul, she had been a member of the French underground. She held me fairly spellbound as she told me again about those days, those weeks, those months, those awful years. There was almost an ecstatic look upon her face when she recited how they very cleverly outwitted the Nazis, how successfully they accomplished this exploit and that exploit and brought to a successful conclusion this plot or that plot....and then she said the day came when we were caught, and they carted me off to prison. It was a laughable thing, this trial they had, but she said, I cannot begin to tell you the terrible feeling, the terrifying thing that comes to a person, born to be free, when you're thrown into a cell, and the key in the lock is turned, and the guard walks away, and you're left with a frightening emptiness.....

...but then you should have seen the look on her face when she said, "The



day came when I was released - - it is indescribable to be made free!"

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They tell me that when the Jamaicans came to the day when they were going to be made free, they got up in the middle of the night, and they gathered themselves together as a company and they climbed in the darkness the highest hill, and there they waited....waited until the first rays of the sun should appear, the first streaks of brightness - - they didn't want to miss a single second of the day that guaranteed freedom - - they wanted to claim every single second of it. And then when the darkness gave way to the brightness of the day, one of their number has recorded for others to read, - - "They sang, they danced, they embraced one another, they shouted, they prayed, they fell on their knees...they were almost like mad men! But there was one word, in staccato-like fashion, that was echoed and re-echoed - - 'Free! We're free!'" It could be that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that can compare with the moment of release when the shackles are taken away and the door is open.

I told you I have never been in prison, but in the preparation for this sermon it was made increasingly plain to me that I have been a prisoner. For I am a sinner, and my sin has enslaved me; and as I prepared this sermon I said to myself, I shall go to a pulpit, and there will be waiting the congregation - - you - - if you please....and if it were possible for me to look each one of you straight in the eye I could say with complete candor, "My fellow prisoner - - my fellow enslaved ones!" .....for you, too, are a prisoner ....you, too, come under the indictment of Jesus Christ, "Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin, is the servant of sin."

And quite frankly, if you haven't called it sinful, then let me tell you how you have called it....."I'm frustrated" ..... "I'm hemmed in"..... "I'm

"THE BLESSED - "  
( those to whom Heaven belongs)

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The sermon for today bears the title "The Blessed"; and the text is from the 5th chapter of Matthew, which is the Gospel for the Day, the 1st, the 2nd and a portion of the 3rd verses:

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Any pastor who has known frustration (and who hasn't?) doesn't on occasion picture Jesus Christ as God's Great Free-lancer, who turned His back upon a carpenter's shop and went wandering, freely, from town to town, speaking to anyone who might happen to hear Him, completely free from any kind of structure or program. Again and ever so often, a pastor likes to think that that's the way it was with Jesus Christ. Any number of pastors being interviewed in this day and age will tell you that they rebel against the fact that there is such a thing as parish administration, the monotonous routine, the endless amount of detail. No less a person than the President of the Lutheran Church in America, Franklin Clark Fry, has said that sometimes he looks upon himself as a man with a can of oil in his hand, simply giving a squirt here and a squirt there, keeping ecclesiastical machinery well oiled. This is far from a noble profession of the prophet or the pastor.

Despite my frustrations I tell you this: if the years have taught me anything, I think I have begun to learn that this endless routine of monotonous

impinged on all sides" ..... "I'm fed up with it all" ..... "I can't take it any longer"

.....if you've ever talked like this, if you've ever thought like this - - this is the language of the enslaved! - - this is the language of the sensitive prisoner. Who is it who says, "If any man says he is not a slave to sin he is a liar"? And then one day came Jesus Christ.

And who is this Jesus Christ? You do not see Him as He is if you see Him only as preacher, prophet, miracle worker, good example. You must see Him as God intended Him to be, you must see Him as the redeemed know Him to be: He is liberator - - He is the Saviour who sets me free from my sin.

He sets me free by declaring the truth.

What truth? .... "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"

.....what truth?

The truth about myself.

No man is ever fit to read the fine print of his own life, for the simple reason, we read too much between the lines, and we project a certain line of thought even before we take the words and allow them to be imprinted upon our mind. One day there was a fisherman who was complete struck by the awesomeness of Jesus Christ and he could say only one thing: "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man".....and he never used those words, perchance, until there was that moment of confrontation, that encounter with Jesus Christ. And the truth of God made plain in Jesus Christ reveals to me the truth of my soul.

I'll grant you, sin is a word that's not popular in our vocabulary.

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We'll use quite readily such words as "nasty"....."not quite honorable"....  
"not very pretty".....but the old-timers used to say "That's a shameful  
thing" - - and occasionally there was one sensitive enough to say, "That's  
downright wicked!" The cult of psychiatry and the analyst have any number of  
other words for it, and occasionally you find someone, who with all his learn-  
ing and with all his spiritual sensitivity, says, "But there is only One who  
can set you free, and His name is Jesus Christ."

And that leads me to share with you the other truth that He declares.  
He tells me the truth about myself: basically I am sinful. But He also tells  
me that I am a child of God, that God who, when He made me, made me as I was  
meant to be, and gave me freedom at the very beginning....and then I didn't  
know how to use that freedom, and because I spoiled it, I became enslaved by  
my own willful nature. But the God who made me is not a God who washes His  
hands and walks away. The truth about God, says Jesus Christ, is that He  
loves me despite my sin, He loves me because of my sin, He loves me in the  
face of my sin.....and anyone who has ever seen Jesus Christ can rever-  
ently say - - GOD.

The truth which is revealed in Jesus Christ is the truth of God - - God  
as He is, Creator and Redeemer, the Heavenly Father who is holy and righteous  
and loving. This was the precious truth that was brought back to us anew by  
the blessed Reformers. This was Martin Luther for you, who at a time could  
hardly say his prayers, because he was dealing with something less than the  
truth about God, to see Him only as a judge, and to emphasize His vindictive-  
ness - - this is less than the truth.

Thanks be to the blessed Reformers, they took the church to task for

proclaiming something less than the Gospel, and the Gospel to be properly understood must always be the truth which is God who redeems - - just because He happens to be the kind of God that He is! When I know this truth and when I continue in this truth, then I am made free.

There is such a thing as the freedom of the committed! Yet a committed one is always one who is always under orders. For once a man has accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour, he is no longer in the tyrannous grip of sin. Now up to the time when he was converted, he sinned either because he wanted to do so, or because he could not help it. But now, once he commits himself to Jesus Christ and walks in the company of the redeemed as a disciple and continues in the way of the Lord he is made free.....even though he may remain a sinner until the day he dies! But the freedom of the redeemed is the assurance that man was not meant for Hell - - the blessed Truth of the Gospel is this - -

- - he was meant for Heaven.

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detail, this imprisonment which is called structure, has become a divinely appointed opportunity - - that one learns to work within the framework that he finds himself, and recognizes the challenge of God in this way. That's one reason why, in the preparation of this sermon, there was a measure of seemingly endless joy that came to my heart when I discovered, as I had not known it before, that Jesus Christ was not the Great Free-lancer - - He did have an itinerary, He did have a plan, He did have a program. Reading the Gospel record, we know that He went from place to place with a purpose in mind. And even when you come to the Gospel lesson for today, there are those who have labeled it a blue-print, an indication, specifically so, of the kind of person Jesus Christ expects His followers to be.

Oh, I'm not forgetting, and I wouldn't have you forget it, that there were those wonderful things that happened "after hours" - - that there were these exceedingly precious incidental ministries. This grace of God was always readily available. But we must also remember, even as we used to talk about it in days gone by: God's Plan for Salvation - - don't belittle the word "plan" - - don't belittle the word "program".

When one comes to consider this Gospel lesson for today he reads with profit the Bible students who tell us that it could be that this was an ordination service, these precious jewels that you find in the Sermon on the Mount. There's one scholar at least who maintains that Jesus had called together His disciples, and now having called them, He is in duty bound to lay before them the kind of thing they are to preach, the kind of person they are to become. And so one writer says, picture the Sermon on the Mount taking place with Jesus here....and then before Him three concentric circles - -

- - the first, the disciples, speaking perhaps directly to them;



- - and then the second in the series of three concentric circles: other followers...

...perhaps not quite as committed as the disciples. And don't you ever dare forget this - - that in God's plan He has a concern for those less sensitive than you. God just doesn't specialize in dealing with the extraordinarily committed ones. Sometimes you and I become guilty of this. We have our own little circle and we think God speaks plainly and directly to us, and we forget that God also has His eyes on other people, and sometimes they're outside even the church.

Well, there are these three circles - -

- - the disciples
- - and before them the twelve
- - and then behind this wider circle of disciples, the greater number, the multitude, if you please...

...who come here for a number of different reasons...out of curiosity, not yet knowing enough to commit themselves, but they're there.

And gladsome truth! - - the message that He has to share is the same. He doesn't just whisper one thing in my ear and then whisper something else in your ear. To the committed and the less committed the message is the same. We may respond in different ways, but the message is the same.

So He stood up before the multitude, and then He sat down. We'll talk about this a little bit later in the sermon, about this sitting down. But as He spoke to them He used one word repeatedly - "blessed". It's a priceless word, and the Greeks had a word for it. When they thought of 'blessed' they used the word *machariss*(?), and Bible scholars tell us that they used to use

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'macharias' for an island called Cyprus; and they believed that whoever went to Cyprus would find himself in an idyllic state...the trees,...the flowers...the shrubs...the fruits of the good earth...the skies above...the very air that a man would breath...the mineral resources that came from the earth.... They who loved Cyprus used to say, it was 'macharias' - - it was the blessed isle - - here was true serenity, here was true peace, here was true joy! Well, that's the word that you must understand as chosen by Jesus Christ when He starts talking about the people who belong to His Kingdom. These are the blessed ones.

I'm not so sure that the translator has done us a service when he said you can use the word 'happy'.....

" Happy are the poor in spirit - -

"Happy are they that mourn - -

" Happy are the meek - -

" Happy are they which hunger and thirst after

righteousness - - - -

...for properly understood, that word 'happy' or 'happiness' involves the Anglo-Saxon 'hap' - - which leaves us to be victimized by circumstances, the pressures, the strains and the tensions that come to play upon us...you and I are happy when things go well, we are unhappy when things do not go well. But it doesn't follow to say that we are blessed when things go well, or that we are unblessed when things do not go well. In the mind of Jesus Christ the state of blessedness is a permanent thing - - it is not dependent upon the winds of change and circumstance. Now this is the kind of person that Jesus Christ is talking about, and it's His blueprint for the character of the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven,

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You're not forgetting the kind of person to whom He spoke, are you? They weren't (and I hesitate to use the word, but I must use it) - - they weren't always looked upon as the best kind of person. In fact, Kelsis, in his great attack against Christianity made sport of it on this account. He said you can tell a man by the kind of people he attracts - - "show me a man's followers, and I'll tell you the kind of man the leader is"....so Kelsis thought he had a field day when he said it then! - - "The ones who are being attracted to Jesus Christ - - the rag and the tail of humanity, the flotsam and the jetsam, the dregs of mankind."

And then, God be praised, there was a saint who stood up and he spoke the very word that had to be spoken against Kelsis, and he said, "This they may be, they are the rag and the tail of humanity who come - - but look what He makes of them! Look at the kind of person they become once they've been touched by Jesus Christ, once they know that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!" This is the acid test - - the kind of person they become! So this must be said.

As Jesus blueprinted for them the kind of Christian character He used the word 'blessed' - - - an inner peace, joy, and serenity....it characterizes the committed.

But did you notice the way I tried to read the Gospel lesson for you? - - the emphasis on that word are - - blessed are these people. This state of blessedness is not something that Jesus Christ is promising at some remote time! It isn't something that's going to be ours only in the day of glory.

Now let it be understood, there is such a thing as the Gospel of the Hereafter, and some of us live our years in the prospect of the Hereafter - -

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some of us try to keep our lives in tune with what will be our reward in Heaven, whether we say in Heaven Above, or whether we simply say in heaven. I would not want to live another hour if I could not believe that some day there would be this perfection, and there would be this consummation, and on this All Saints' Day we could not rest easily if we did not believe that those whom we love in Christ, who having finished their earthly pilgrimage, do now enjoy the estate of the bliss and Heaven's perfect peace.

But let us get this one thing straight at once: the blessedness of the Christian life is not something that's only to be known after the moment of death - - then it shall have its fullest realization. In the meantime, even now, the devoutly committed who are Christ's may experience something of its peace and its joy. He happens to be that kind of God, who allows us to have a foretaste of Heaven - - now.

And you know one place where this foretaste is most guaranteed? - with all my heart I believe it - - - within the company of those who are being redeemed...and that's my word for the Christian Church. That's why we spell it out in a classic way in the Creed, and keep reminding ourselves of it Sunday after Sunday....

"I believe in the Holy Christian Church, - - "

(no semi-colon there, but a comma)

" I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the

Communion of Saints - - "

.....within the body of believers this foretaste of Heaven is to be known, and the person who commits himself to Christ and walks with the company of the redeemed becomes a reflection of the peace and the joy which belongs to those who are Christ's.

I suppose that's one reason why, and I say it to you quite candidly,

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that I feel hurt when I discover myself part of a generation that's raised up an angry lot, who take peculiar delight in taking pot-shots at the Church, ridiculing it, laughing at it, minimizing its effectiveness. The Church is the Body of Christ, made up of people like you, made up of people like me, with all of our frailties, with all of our limitations, with all of our noble endeavors and our weakness - - - but this is the Bride of Christ! Every sermon to an extent is autobiographical.....I would not give these years that God has bestowed upon me, poor as my efforts may be, to serving Him through the Holy Christian Church if I did not believe what I am telling you. And this is why there's always the hurt when people who through their immaturity or their unwisdom may become cynical and bitter about the Church. Aside from the gift that the individual knows when he's claimed by the redeeming grace, there is absolutely nothing more precious to the believer than this quickening relationship which is the Body of Christ, and it's ours to cherish, and to prize.

And that's why, if any man would say to me, what is your noble dream for Saint Luke Congregation?

- - do I have to tell you? after these years  
you should know it so well - -

...that within our company, within this body of believers which is our congregation, we should be able to reflect something of the peace and the joy which is Heaven itself. To that end we work the way we do, and we worship the way we ought, and should look upon any other person as a fellow pilgrim whose ultimate destination is Heaven's perfect peace.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"IF GODNESS LEAD HIM NOT - "  
( - those who come to Christ out of  
sheer desperation)

The sermon bearing the title, "If Goodness Lead Him Not" is based upon the Gospel for the Day; and the text, a portion of the 18th verse of the 9th chapter of Matthew:

"While he spake these things unto them,  
behold, there came a certain ruler, and  
worshipped him, saying, My daughter is  
even now dead: .....come "

We run the risk sometimes in trying to make very simple statements, yet there's something to be said for it. Honestly now, do you suppose it can be put this way: that men come to Jesus Christ either because they are drawn to Him or because they are driven to Him.

Now that is to say something over and beyond the tremendous truth, that Jesus Christ is the inescapable one. Make no mistake about it, soon or late you'll be confronted by Jesus Christ, it's simply a matter of when, and how. You may avoid Him for a while, you may do your best to evade Him, but He does remain the inescapable one.

Now for our purpose this morning shall we examine the motives that bring men into His presence. There are those, very few in number unfortunately, who are drawn to Jesus Christ, they are attracted to Him. His perfect beauty, His perfect grace, strikes a responsive chord, and they cannot keep from it, and their immediate reaction is one of adoration. There are people like that. And the hymn writer of the 17th century has expressed it magnificently when he says:



"How can I choose but love thee, God's dear Son,  
O Jesus, loveliest, and most loving One!  
Were there no heaven to gain, no hell to flee,  
For what thou art alone I must love thee.

Not for the hope of glory or reward,  
But even as thyself hast loved me, Lord,  
I love thee, and will love thee and adore,  
Who art my King, my God, for evermore."

...there are some people who talk like that to Jesus Christ. But they are few indeed.

And the rest of us may not talk to Him like that, at least not at first, and it isn't simply because we haven't got His blood coursing through our veins. It's primarily because the greater part of people find themselves in the presence of Jesus Christ, not because they're drawn to Him, but because they're driven to Him - - they come not out of adoration, they come out of desperation. Life for them has been one series of frustrations after another, and the sum total seems to be - - desperation.

I have lived long enough, thank God, not to allow myself the privilege, if one dare even call it that, to judge - - not to sit here and belittle a man who does not come to Christ because he adores Him. I have lived long enough to appreciate the fact that the important thing is that a man should come to Christ. And maybe for the most of us we don't come to Him from the higher motivations, maybe they'll always be a little bit less than adequate. Maybe our coming to Jesus Christ will always be, for the most of us, something a little bit less than noble.

But the God who claims my heart and the God whose Gospel I proclaim to you is the God of Jesus Christ whose arms are outstretched, and whose words constantly remain....."Whosoever will - " ..... "him that comes to me I will not cast out - " ..... this we must never, never forget - - He is this kind

of God: "I am waiting.....I am waiting....I am waiting for you - -  
- whenever you come, I will be here."

It goes without saying, it's an exceedingly wonderful thing when a person can see Jesus Christ for what He is, and immediately adore Him, and respond from a good and genuine heart.

And there's always something a bit tragic about the person who turns to Him almost too late.....

the words were carefully chosen....

almost too late.

It's never too late for a man to turn to Jesus Christ, as far as Christ's willingness to receive him is concerned.

Now let's look at the Gospel lesson for today. There's a central character, and you meet him at the very beginning. His name is 'Jairus, he is known as the ruler of the synagogue. I have some things to tell you about him that you ought to know. It's only sometimes as you get the whole story that you can appreciate the meaning of the thing itself.

As a ruler of the synagogue he belonged to a company of people who, if they had their way, would have eliminated Jesus Christ; he was not a charter member of the Society of the Friends of Jesus. They had watched Him, they had observed Him, by this time they had been convinced that eventually He was going to spell a kind of death-knell for their way of life, that He had something far more fresh and invigorating and vitalizing than the kind of religion that they had. And so Jairus might have been part of a group who, if they had their way, then and there would have eliminated Jesus Christ. You have to know this about this man.

Then too, you must also recognize that even though he was a man in a prominent position, he was nonetheless human, and every human being, in one way or

another, can have his heart ache. The tragic blow can come to any one of us, and so it came one day to the home of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. God did not look down from Heaven above and say, "There is Jairus, a good man, the presiding elder of the synagogue - - I will make him immune to suffering and hardship - - I will allow only those who walk at so great distance to know misery and pain - - " .....even though He is a God of love, He doesn't throw any kind of mantle around certain people.

Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, was a father, and they had a daughter, only one daughter. She had reached the marriageable age, it's comparatively young in the East, and I suppose because he was the kind of man that he was, he looked forward to the day when she would have issue, even as he and his wife had had issue, and there would be grandchildren.....and the thrill of seeing life projected and extended beyond your own immediate family circle. And then one day the tragic blow came....and she was dead.

Jairus seemingly refuses to accept the fact, and so great was his desperation that against a dead child he cries out, and he goes looking for the Jesus-man....and in desperation he says - - "Come! Come, lay your hand upon her - - she'll live!" Jairus did not come to Jesus Christ because he adored Him. Jairus came to Jesus Christ because he was desperate. He only knew one thing: he was in need, and if as a last resort he'd try Jesus, then he would try Jesus.

....let me say this to you quite parenthetically, and quite importantly -

- it's always a salutary thing when a man knows only one thing about himself and about Jesus Christ - - it's always a salutary thing when he knows that Jesus Christ has something that he needs ...and unashamedly he will fall at the feet of Jesus Christ and ask for it.....

I appreciate theology. I would like to become a better student of theology.

I appreciate the doctrine of the church, and I would not want to belong to any church that did not have a well-defined doctrine....but I would ask God to save me from the day when I would first say to any man, "Is your doctrine of the church proper? - - is your theological view of the Lord Jesus perfect?" ...men do not have to wait until they have well-defined notions about Jesus Christ that can be properly packaged up in formulas. They need only one thing - - an awareness of their need, and the assurance that Jesus Christ can meet that need.....

....so the desperate Jairus came to Jesus Christ.

It's easy to be charitable with Jairus. I shall not take him to task for waiting as long as he did. It's easy to be charitable....because there's something that you ought to know about him. He took a long, deep swallow when he turned toward Jesus Christ. He swallowed all of his pride. He was, you see, the ruler of the synagogue. He was the chief man who opposed Jesus Christ, at least as things were developing at that time; and as the ruler of the synagogue he was presumed to have an inside track with the goodness of God. The fact remained, his daughter was dead....and he pocketed his pride, and he came to Jesus Christ.

There are those who tell us that this is the most vulnerable of all barriers between Christ and men - - their pride. They know a measure of satisfaction in getting along without Jesus Christ, and they like to think they can handle any problem of life completely by themselves. And the truth of the matter is that God never made any man big enough to handle life all by himself. God never made any man big enough to even handle himself by himself. Jairus swallowed his pride and came running to Jesus Christ.

They tell us there's a famous story of Roland, the paladin of Charlemagne. He was in charge of the rear guard of the army and he was suddenly caught up by the Saracens. The battle raged fiercely.....there were tremendous odds against him. Now the story puts it this way, that Roland had a very unusual horn that had been taken from a giant in his day; and the horn was such an instrument that when blown, it could be heard for thirty miles away...and its blast was so great that when it tore through the air, birds would fall dead to the ground.

Charlemagne was very fond of his paladin, Roland, and to his captain of the rear guard he said, "Do not hesitate to blow this horn when you need me." .....The battle raged on. Roland was proud. He thought he could handle the situation by himself, he would not ask for help....and one by one his company fell dead. And then, as the last resort, he blew his horn. Charlemagne came, hopefully to help. But when he arrived the rear guard had been wiped out, and Roland himself was dead.....his pride, you see, did it.

My friend, with all the pastor's heart that God has given me, I beg you, do not let your pride keep you from Jesus Christ. Falling upon one's knees is a mark of humility, and properly so. He alone can save you - - He alone can help you. And this is most certainly true for where you need Him most, and that's in the forgiveness of sins. There is none other Saviour.

It's always a troublesome thing for anyone who walks among people long enough to get to know them, to see how they think they can go on their own, or resort to things other than Jesus Christ...

....that undue reliance upon the tranquilizer

...the very dangerous thing of the up-turned glass,

and the emptying of a bottle

...the stealing away into illicit relationship, as though  
one could drown himself in a sea of lust, and turn a  
curtain upon reality itself

...but Jesus Christ always remains - He is there.

F. W. Faber, a hymnwriter also, says, when he talks about a straying child  
who went away from God:

"If goodness lead him not,  
then weariness may toss him to my arms - "

Granted it may be as a last resort, God will be there. But in the meantime,  
think of the greater blessing that has been lost, and the greater good that  
could be let loose in this world through the life of the person who could have  
come earlier.

I have one final word to you - - I wish I did not have to say it....

...there are those who might have come sooner to Jesus Christ - -

if only the transformation in your life and my life could  
have been more convincing, could have been more attractive.

Radha Krishnam is the President of the People's Government in India. He  
is a great thinker....a marvelous mind. And he has pressed an indictment against  
every Christian when he once said to a preacher, "What could your Jesus do for  
me, over and above what I have seen that He has done for you?".....and the  
lamentable thing is this: the man to whom he spoke those words had not made  
his Christ very attractive.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



"TO WHICH THE WHOLE CREATION MOVES"

( - that one far-off divine event - - the  
universal and eternal role of God)

Text: For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and  
shineth even unto the west; so shall also the  
coming of the Son of man be.

(Matthew 24:27)

Men either talk too much or too little about the Second Coming; it seems difficult to strike a happy medium on the subject. Not to talk about it enough is to minimize a basic Christian doctrine. On the other hand, to give it undue emphasis leads frequently to vain speculation and idle fascination.

It is true that the Scriptures make much of the return of our Lord. Again and ever so often, particularly near the end of His ministry, our Lord gathered His company of disciples together and spoke to them, even in parables of judgment, about His return. So we ourselves have written it boldly into our creeds. But it does not automatically follow that all believers share a common understanding of this Great Event to which Christ referred directly on a number of occasions. To put it quite frankly, there is confusion aplenty when men begin to discuss those five simple words in the Second Article of the Creed - - "and He shall come again - - ". It is always embarrassing for me as a pastor...when people put the question to me - - Do you Lutherans believe in the Second Coming? - - of course we believe in the Second Coming! Every Sunday when we gather for worship we declare this fact as we recite the historic Creed. And furthermore, our Church Year sets aside its first four Sundays to deal with this important truth. Advent is something more than a pre-Christmas season. It is also to be understood as a call to remembrance of the re-appearance of our Lord.

There is need for guidelines clearly drawn for any understanding of the Second Coming. Fortunately for us, Matthew 24, from which the Gospel lesson for this day is taken, lists a few of them. Let us consider them now:

(a) the parousia - - that's the old-time word for the Second Coming - - it is to be a sudden thing and will strike terror into the hearts of unbelievers. It will be like a flash of lightning - beautiful, glorious, splendid. So Mark 13:26, Luke 17:24 and Luke 21:27 share this basic concept with Matthew 24:27-30.

(b) the parousia will force men to recognize the fact of eternity. The Old Testament tells us how the flood shocked people - - a people who allowed themselves to be forever pre-occupied with the present moment, whether it be pleasure or pain, and never saw it in its relationship to eternity. The re-appearance of our Lord will confront men with eternity.

(c) the parousia will be a time of separation because it is essentially a time of judgment. Now you can't quite quarrel with me on this score. This is not something that I myself have imagined. Our Lord Himself spoke of the role of Judge and we ourselves have spelled out the purpose of His return as we put it into the Creed - - "and He shall come again to judge - " As much as you may wish it otherwise, it simply isn't so. Each of us perhaps would prefer to believe that at the end He who is a God of love with one grand gesture will sweep us all up and snatch us from the jaws of hell. As a God of love we faultily permit ourselves to think that He just can't afford to lose a single soul. But the Scriptures do not say this. While it is His will that all men should be saved and that Christ alone gives meaning to the words that God so loved the world, yet man's response is essential. Judgment can have no meaning at all if it does not provide for condemnation as well as acquittal.

(d) the parousia will come at a time unknown - to all save God.

Against all this we can say that we should not give ourselves to idle speculation, but rather prepare ourselves with diligence, discerning carefully "the signs of the times" so that we shall be made ready. For in time of His appearing, a man is either ready, or unprepared.

Now let us pass on to the theme of this sermon. Whatever else we may understand or not understand about the Second Coming of Christ, there are several truths which command attention.

In the first place, let us talk a bit about that word parousia as over against the expression in most common use among us today - - Second Coming. The ancients preferred the word parousia and it always referred to the re-appearance of a prince or someone in authority. Perchance the prince of a particular kingdom had gone away for a while, but his subjects always knew that there would come a day when he would return; upon his return he would re-establish himself and his subjects would give an accounting. It was always understood that the kingdom belonged to him and that no man could gainsay his authority. So when we think of the Second Coming we can well afford to think in terms of the re-appearance of God's Prince!

In the second place, the fact of the Second Coming is illustrative of God's continued action. As far as God is concerned - - there is always more to come. Our Lord made that plain to His disciples when He talked about His arrest, His trial and His death. He begged them to understand how the story would go on. There followed the reference to resurrection, ascension, and even the return of the Son of Man - - that one far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves.

You should bring me up short on my reference to God's continued action. You should remind me that there's a better way of saying it. The whole story is not

told by simply referring to a continued action. God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is just <sup>not</sup> given to busyness. So it is far better said: "God's continuing purposeful action" ...and the word to underline here is purposeful. God is always working with an end in view. He has a purpose to be fulfilled. Now this is not always commonly understood nor believed. The Stoics, as an example, maintained that life is cyclic, and that the "same weary round of things would happen over and over again." The Stoics taught that each period in history had certain fixed characteristics and each period would come to an end, and then the whole story in its minutest detail would begin all over again. It was Chrysippus who wrote, "Then again the world is restored anew in a precisely similar arrangement as before. The stars again move in their orbits, each performing its revolution in the former period, without any variation. Socrates and Plato and each individual man will live again, with the same friends and fellow-citizens. They will go through the same experiences and the same activities. Every city and village will be restored just as it was, and this restoration of the universe takes place not once, but over and over again - - indeed to all eternity without end." To believe this, of course, is to believe that man is bound, imprisoned within a treadmill in which there is no progress.

But the truth of the Second Coming is that God has an end in view and that even history serves His purposes.

It could be that every generation has those who believe that life is one meaningless and monotonous round of repetitions. Bertrand Russell and others speak of this "mad, monstrous world, void of meaning." And no less a person than James Thurber reveals a sad heart upon a serious reflection as to the meaning of things. Thurber, whose purpose was to make man laugh, once wrote - -

- "Every man is occasionally visited by the suspicion that the planet on which he is riding is not really going anywhere; that the Force which controls its measured eccentricities hasn't got anything special in mind. If he broods upon this somber theme long enough he gets the doleful idea that the laughing child on a merry-go-round or the thin, fine hands of a lady's watch are revolving more purposefully than he is." Or again, in a "Free Man's World" Bertrand Russell insists that "Man is the product of causes which had no pre-vision of the end they were achieving - - that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms." But I tell you it is neither Christian to believe that man is imprisoned within an eternal treadmill, that life is simply one series of meaningless and monotonous repetitions, nor that all that has ever happened has been accidental and without purpose. This is the philosophy of those who do not know Christ. The concept of the Second Coming is illustrative of the fact that God has continuing action which is purposeful.

And what is more, the end toward which God works is a matter of triumph and of victory. That grand old man to whom the revelation was made plain, so much so that the last Book in the Bible bears that name, was able to talk not only of the weakness of the Church and the apparent failures of men, but over and above all this he strikes magnificently the note of triumph when he captions it all with "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth - alleluia!" I say to you as I think of my own life, that despite the frailty of the flesh, despite every frustration, despite every failure, I want to go on, for I have reason to believe that as I await the re-appearance of our Lord I will know that He will give meaning to this one life. Because I believe this so fervently I come again and again to this sacred desk, that you may be able to think and to say the same thing.



"TOO LATE!"  
( - - on being ready!)

"Too Late" is the title of the sermon which is based upon the Gospel lesson for today; and the text is the 12th verse of the 25th chapter of Matthew:

"But he answered and said, Verily  
I say unto you, I know you not."

It was another one of those stories which Jesus was telling. The closer He came to the end of His ministry the more He seemed full of them, and again and ever so often He resorted to the telling of a story to establish very clearly in their minds a fundamental truth. It may have been that it occurred to Jesus now after having preached for three years, the people who heard Him preach didn't quite understand what He was trying to say. There was so much which they just hadn't comprehended. And now as He knew that His days were numbered, He told them one story after another, and invariably the theme of each of these stories dealt with the fact of Judgment.

Take the one that serves as the Gospel lesson for today. It's one of the most detailed stories that Jesus ever told. And when you read the words, and when you notice what He is saying to them, sternly and severely, you wonder why in the world He ever told a story like that, because it seems so out of character, it just doesn't seem like Jesus to establish so firmly in their minds the kind of thing that's involved in this story.

Take the words of the text as a good example: "For verily, verily I say unto you, I don't know you" - - can you imagine Jesus Christ ever saying anything like that to a person? And yet Jesus Christ in the telling of the story lays down very clearly for anyone who might hear or anyone who might read that



there comes a time when doors will be shut, and the man who is on the other side, no matter how much they may cry out, the door remains shut - - "I don't know you - the time to enter is over - you are too late!"

...perhaps the most lamentable words in our vocabulary could be those two words - too late. Someone, you know, has described hell that way. You know what that man's definition of hell is? - - the truth found out too late.

Let us go back now and remind ourselves of certain details of the story. Jesus told it for a purpose, and that we might better understand it we should familiarize ourselves again with the details of the story. It was taken right from a page in Oriental life, as though Jesus had just seen it occur the night before...

...ten women had been asked to serve as the attendants to the bride. Now the bride always waited for the bridegroom to appear. The wedding never took place until the groom would allow the people to know that he was now ready to be married. Oh, weeks and months perhaps in advance the word would go out that there was going to be a wedding....when the invitation was received you only knew one thing - - that two people were going to be married. You never knew the exact hour, you never knew the exact day. I can't tell you why that was the custom of the Near East; I can only tell you that that was the custom. ...now it was the responsibility of these bridesmaids to stay with the bride, to keep her company, and then to form part of the procession when the word had come that the groom was ready. They would keep as part of their equipment a lamp, because sometimes the wedding would take place at night, and no one was allowed to be in the procession unless he was carrying a lamp... ..and Jesus says, the bridesmaids were invited, they were charged with the

responsibility, but lo and behold, on this particular occasion the bridegroom delayed - - he didn't come as soon as they thought he was going to come. And in the interim, five of the bridesmaids were caught napping, five of them were caught unready, that is; and when the time came for the wedding to take place, five of them were told, "You can't enter."

Now this is the story that Jesus told. Why did He tell it? He told it because He wanted to establish clearly in their minds that man should be prepared. "Be prepared" is a good motto for the spiritual life, but Jesus was no Scoutmaster. Jesus was dealing with the fundamental issues of life. He is the most profound of all religious teachers. So now He tells them that there is such a thing as Eternity, and a man should always be prepared for it.

When you read what precedes the telling of this story you discover that Jesus was talking about some terrible things that were going to happen. And then as over against that He says, "Let me tell you the story about a wedding - " Now when Jesus turned their attention to a wedding He turned their attention to a very glad and wonderful experience. A wedding was the happiest of moments in the life of the bride and the groom. In the Near East there are no happier days than the days associated with a wedding, and they made these days one continuous round of merriment. Life ordinarily was drab and monotonous in the Near East; and so they were happy when a wedding day could be announced. It was always a time of rejoicing, and they didn't want it to be just on one day, one afternoon, but the wedding celebration would go on sometimes for a week, sometimes for ten days.

As some of you know, my father came from the Near East, and to this very day, at eighty-three years of age, his face will light up when you ask him to tell you about his wedding day, because when he came to this country and fell

in love with the woman that he chose to marry they were married in New York City, but he could never have done with the customs of the homeland; and so their marriage celebration was after the custom of the Near East. And they had ten days of celebration, being feted and dined day after day - - a happy celebration.

Now this is the first thing that you've got to note in the telling of this story, this parable of Judgment...He likened it unto a wedding feast, He likened it unto the appearance of the bridegroom, a time of rejoicing....and for this time of rejoicing you and I, He says, are to get ready.

My friend, you can't make too much of that. We have a way of preparing ourselves always for the tragic, presumably speaking. When anyone says be prepared, it's against the calamitous blow, you see. We think in terms of the worst that could happen to us, and we want to make ready against that day. This is one reason why we buy insurance, either on our own lives, lest we be taken suddenly, and a burden be placed on those who are near and dear to us, to face that emergency....this is why we buy insurance upon our automobiles, upon our homes, upon our furnishings, against theft - - that we might be made ready, when perhaps the unexpected which could be tragic might occur. It seems to be the better part of wisdom to prepare against the calamitous blow.

But lo and behold, here you have Jesus Christ saying to us, get ready for the good thing that's going to happen, lest when it does occur you should be totally unprepared for it. God is the great giver of joy - - God is the precious promiser of Heaven. Whatever God puts in His hand for you and for me, it's a good thing.....and would you believe me, or are you too far away from it in time that you can't think of it, that even Heaven itself is the most precious of good things that God offers. And against that day, Jesus Christ says, get ready! The bridegroom is going to appear - - the time of rejoicing is yet

to take place - - - who knows but what the best is yet to be!

Occasionally it's my good fortune to counsel with young people....and some of them are kind enough and good enough to let me in on their lives when they begin dating, and they talk about this friend, and they talk about this attachment to that person. And then, by the grace of God, which I cannot say to them explicitly, I ask God to give me the wisdom by which I can lay before them the fact that in these impressionable days of youth and young adulthood they should not dissipate their energies, but rather that they should allow each day to be a kind of preparation for the one day when the prince charming will appear. We have reason to believe that God does intend for us a good mate, a good person, we have reason to believe that in God's plan for a man and for a woman that this should be true. And then one day when he does appear, then one day when she should appear - - - what a tragic thing it would be if in the interim we had wasted our years, taken too quickly the fruits that we had no right to touch....and then when the pure and the good should be there, we should not be ready to claim it.....

....one could use the analogy, one could use the same principle for all of life. For every day is a kind of preparation for the better thing. This I most certainly believe.

Sometimes I am forced to believe that maybe we Christians have lost it, maybe this is why we become so involved whenever there are the social issues of our day - - we become frightened and horrified. And yet the Christian ought to see in any crisis an opportunity for a blessing and for adherence to God's noble dream. Some writer has said that apparently the only people in the world today who seem to be happy in the prospect of unsettlement are the communists, because the communist sees in every unsettlement of life as an opportunity for him. Should we take a page from his book? Should we permit ourselves to be-

lieve, that even as the Chinese understands the word crisis - - the Chinese calls it a "dangerous opportunity." Dare a Christian believe that in any kind of unsettlement God's good thing can be grasped? Before our Lord told this parable of Judgment, before He told the parable of the appearance of the bridegroom, He had been talking about dark and miserable nights that would visit this earth, and He said, "Then the Kingdom of Heaven shall be like the appearance of the bridegroom - - " ...so I say to you in the telling of a story Jesus says, get prepared for the best that's yet to come.

And the second thing that's found clearly in the parable: the preparation that has to be made is a preparation that has to be made beforehand. There are some things that you don't get ready for by the wink of the eye and the snap of your finger. No man in the moment of death can prepare himself fully and completely and perfectly for the gift of Heaven. Every now and then when you read the pages of biography you can see for yourself how certain men were given the opportunity to serve in remarkable positions of service, but they were not ready. The opportunity was theirs, but the weeks and the months and the years prior to that moment had not been used as a kind of preparation. Get ready for the best that's yet to be, and that preparation has to be made beforehand.

We who have come to know the saving grace of our Redeemer can never say that we were not warned. Again and ever so often Christ placed before His followers the fate of the unready ones; and there are some things in life for which a man must prepare beforehand.

And the third thing that needs to be said is this: that preparation must always be made personally. No man dies by proxy, no man goes to the gate of Heaven by proxy. I may, by the grace of God, show you the way, and I should like to think that that's how you look upon me, I may declare the truth of God, but I

cannot believe it for you.....and no matter how wonderful may be the spiritual capital that you may inherit from your kin, you can't get to the gate of Heaven simply in your grandfather's name.

So Jesus told the parable of Judgment - - He talked about the appearance of the bridegroom. Some day, I tell you, the Prince of God will appear. There will be a great and a glorious moment.....and in that moment you can draw a line.....

...and on one side of the line, those who are ready

.....and on the other side, the unready ones.

\* \* \*



"THE FIFTEENTH YEAR"

( - history has its hinges on which it turns -  
and also its men for its great moments)

The sermon for today, bearing the title, "In The Fifteenth Year" is based upon the Gospel for this First Sunday in Advent; and the text, portions of the first and the second verses of the third chapter of Luke:

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of  
Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being  
governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch  
of Galilee - -  
Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests,  
the word of God came unto John the son of  
Zacharias in the wilderness."

Every now and then you run across a page in the Bible which is like this one. Now its significance, a little bit more than the ordinary, lies in the fact that the recorder seemingly takes extra effort to establish his case historically - - he is pin-pointing this, now, as a matter of record. It is something that did take place at a particular time.

You will notice as I read it for you again, that Luke in this instance refers to this particular time in six different ways, earmarking it by reference to a number of different people, as though it is never to be overlooked -  
- it did happen - -

" - - Now in the fifteenth year - - "

...not the twelfth, not the fourteenth

" - - in the reign of Tiberius Caesar - - "

...not Augustus, but Tiberius

- - at the time when Herod was the ruler of Galilee

- - not just when anyone happened to be high priest, but

at a particular time in history when two men, a bit extraordinary, were associated with the high priesthood ...now against this fact, documented by historical evidence, God is doing something, God is calling to a man in the wilderness, God is calling to a man, the son of Zechariah, John by name, and God speaks to him and God gives him an assignment....and in the fulfillment of that assignment there is the turn of the hinge of history itself.

For history does have its hinges on which it turns. There are certain people who have lived in specific places at a precise time when God saw fit to take the pulse of humanity and to say -- this, this is the hour! (A more refined way of putting it, you Bible scholars, of course, is to say 'in the fullness of time').

Now what does this say to you and to me? Permit at least three or four observations.

In the first place, you and I must never forget that God acts in history. This God whom we love and this God whom we serve is not someone remotely removed from us -- way out there, with blinders on His eyes, completely impervious and indifferent to anything that's happening to us. You and I must always remember that as far as we are concerned, this world is the arena in which we operate, and if God is to have any meaning for us at all, then we must see Him operating in this arena of which we are a part. It means very little to you, it means very little to me, to know that Jesus Christ, as an example, should be only Lord of the Hereafter. I believe that He is Lord of the Hereafter because I see Him operate as the Lord of the Here and the Now and the Present Moment. Again I say, as far as you and I are concerned, the

only arena in which God's operation has any meaning for us right now is when we see Him operating in the world of which we are a part.

And maybe that's why Luke, for all ages yet to come, establishes so clearly, as a matter of historical record, that God broke through at a particular time in a particular place, using particular people....as though we were not to forget it, we even wrote it into our Creeds that way -- when did Jesus live? -- at the time of Pontius Pilate....we document it historically.

So we begin at this point in our observations: this God whom we love, this God whom we would serve, is a God who is active, and He acts in and through history.

The second thing that we do well to recognize is the fact that He is operative when we may not know it. Human as we are, our attention is centered upon the things that overwhelm us -- the might and the power of man, if you please. Who talked about a baby being born in Bethlehem when they were talking about a man by the name of Herod the King? Everyone was talking about the King, everyone was talking about Caesar Augustus, the Emperor, and his dictates, everyone was talking about the oppression of heavy taxation. It was not a very bright world....it was a sad world.....it was a dark world. Yet God was at work - - - silently.....

...and He put His finger upon a man, and He put His finger upon a maiden, and He whispered into their ears,

"You - Joseph!" "You - Mary!"

...and then there was the whimper of a Baby....

....who paid any attention to a baby's cry -- when the world at large was so cruel and so bitter and almost without hope? But God has a way of acting when we don't know it and when we're unaware of it -- but He does!

Harry Emerson Fosdick at the height of his preaching career during World War Two preached a sermon that bore the title, "The Decisive Babies of the World." He got his inspiration undoubtedly from Co  
fifteen decisive battles of the world, for the historian maintains that the battle is the hinge on which history turns. Fosdick says, it's the birth of a baby which becomes the hinge on which history turns, and then he cites instance after instance where this was true. And if I remember correctly, he takes the year 1809 as an example.

In the year 1809 the world was talking about Napoleon Bonaparte, the Angry Conqueror....who wanted to put the world under his heel, and everyone was talking about one victory after another, one oppression after another... ..it was not a very pleasant thing to be alive at the time of such a conqueror.

Do you know what else was happening in 1809?

...in a log cabin there was a baby born named Abraham Lincoln

...in the very same year Charles Darwin was born

...that 1809 was the year when Mendelssohn was born

...that 1809 was the year when Alfred Lord Tennyson was born

...that was the year when Edgar Allen Poe was born

God has a way of raising up those who are to guide and direct the course of history in the years yet to come. God is acting.

Then in 1814, following in the defeat of Napoleon, Russian and Austrian troops sacked Italy, seeking vengeance, massacring here and massacring there. They even chased women into the sanctuary of God's House, thinking that there they would be safe, only to discover that that man's army, like the beasts of the field, raped the women and killed them, even in the shadow of an altar.... ..but there was one woman, with a child at her breast, who succeeded in finding refuge in the belfry tower....and the baby in her arms, the famous Italian composer he became - - Verdi. Napoleon had his day, but as long as there are

people who love things of beauty and truth their souls will be sustained by that baby that God saw fit to save.

What else needs to be said?

This God who acts in history, this God who acts in history sometimes chooses to act when the night is the darkest and the night is the longest. You haven't forgotten, have you, that no one at the beginning, when they began to mark the pages in the calendar, knew exactly the night that Jesus was born. But when the ancient fathers decided to put it on a calendar, as far as we from the West are concerned, they said, we'll observe Christmas, the festival that marks the Nativity of the birth of Jesus Christ, at that time of the year when the nights are the longest and the darkest. For the God who acts sometimes sees fit to act, if you may use the figure of speech, in the extraordinary way, when things are blackest for us.

Now what remains to be said? There are only two things that you and I say to ourselves as we walk away from this truth.....

One is, that this should impart to every single person a measure of confidence and courage. God is not dead....and for the Christian a word that ought to be rid from the vocabulary forever is the word hopeless. For God has a way of taking history and working in it and through it and around it. Even the Apostle Paul could say it so eloquently - - "For we know that all things, whatever happens, can work for good by God's hand."

I do not pose as a prophet, I have no idea what may lie ahead for you or for me, but come wind or weather, God will always be part of it. So then you remember that it was in the fifteenth year God did act, and for your good, and for the blessing of all mankind.

The last thing that needs to be said is this: you and I should pray that God would give us a kind of spiritual sensitivity, that we might be able to discern the finger that writes, and to see this finger that moves and writes as part of the very hand of God. The longer I live the more I am convinced that the tragedy of mankind is this - - not to be able to see God at work. The tragedy of your life and my life is that God should whisper in our ear and we should not hear Him, that God should show us the way, and we would be unable to discern it.

Why does the Church provide us with Advent-tide? - - four weeks before Christmas.....basically a time of preparation, basically a time of quieting of the mind and a hushing of the heart; for as the hymn-writer says, "How silently, how silently - - ". God is not much given to the blowing of trumpets. He does have a way of whispering.

So the last thing that needs to be said, that you and I should learn to pray, increasingly so, that we should be sensitive, made aware, of this God who is at work in history, of the God who is at work in the present moment, of this God who is speaking to you today, of this God who is laying upon you some solemn, sacred task.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)



First Sunday in Advent  
November 29, 1964

O GOD, we began this service in Thy name; and ere we shall go from this holy place we shall depart in Thy name. Now as we turn to Thee in this moment of prayer, enable us with all our hearts to believe that we are speaking to Thee together, that this is a prayer of Thy people.

AND what is it that we want most, O God?

We want to see Your face, we want to hear Your voice, we want to feel the gentle pressure of Your hand upon our souls, we want to know that we belong to You, and that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that ever can cut asunder the bond of love that exists between You and us.

WE would like to believe, O God, that when we turn to Thee with our concern for those whom we love, that You will hear our prayers. Some of us now are thinking of those who are prone to walk without You, who would keep themselves at so great distance, who think that they can order their lives without being afraid of You, or without desiring Your favor.

Some of us, O God, are praying for those who ere this day may be ended will slip through the gate that separates us from Heaven. We pray for those who will minister to them, who allow them to be as eternal pilgrims from earth into the Glory which Thou hast prepared for those who love Thee.

Some of us are praying for those whom Thou hast entrusted to us. They are younger than we, they are older than we, yet for them we have responsibility. We pray, O God, that we may not fail them nor Thee.

THEN, O GOD, every one of us is asking that his sins may be forgiven, and that he may walk in the company of the redeemed, to love and serve Thee with a pure heart.

OUR FATHER.....

"IN THE SHADOW OF ETERNITY"

( - - the essential which is preparedness)

The sermon bears the title, "In The Shadow of Eternity" and the text is from the Gospel for today; it's the 27th verse of the 21st chapter of Luke:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

We were happy and gay teenagers in that small town in which I grew up. And every now and then we'd go worshipping with each other. Some went to the Episcopal church, some to the Methodist Church, some to the Presbyterian, some to the Lutheran. Whenever League was over on a Sunday night, we'd decide which church we'd visit. Occasionally we'd cross the street and go to the Methodist church.

As youngsters would, you note the things that are different, not only in the order of worship that's followed, but in the appointments that you have in a church building. One of the things that remains impressable to this day for me was the artist's interpretation of a Scriptural truth which was painted on the wall high above the pulpit in that Methodist church. It was a picture of Jesus Christ, based, incidentally, upon the very text which I have just read. Here is Jesus Christ, robed in regal splendor, standing, seemingly out of nowhere, surrounded by all the clouds of the universe. This was the picture of Christ that confronted the Methodists when they came to worship in that particular congregation.

Whether they knew it or not, they were doing the very kind of thing which

the early Christians did, for not long after the death of Jesus, whenever the early Christians would worship they would remind themselves that Jesus Christ was going to come again. They even went so far as to keep saying to themselves....."He is coming..

...He is coming..

.....He is coming again."

These Methodists did the right thing, I think, because the fundamental truth that must be laid before us is this: that this same Jesus who was crucified, who arose from the dead, who ascended into Heaven, will some day re-appear - - and this we must never, never forget.

You see, no matter how poor the sermon might have been by that Methodist preacher, even though that Methodist choir might have sung lustily, they still could have sung poorly - - the congregation was still to believe that whenever they came to worship they were to be confronted by this truth, portrayed for them by the artist - - - remember this, you worshippers, this Jesus Christ is coming again.....He will re-appear.

It's the kind of thing that Jesus kept talking about, especially those last days that He spent here on earth; and you can read many of the parables that He spoke when His days were numbered, and you'll find them inevitably parables of Judgment, talking about the end of the world, the thing yet to come...and He always kept Himself central in the end of the world. Whenever He talked about the end of the things yet to occur, He always had Himself in the picture....and this they could not ignore.

Now let it be said at once, as I have told you before, that we must be very careful lest we give ourselves to vain and idle speculation as to the Second Coming. There is so much that I cannot tell you about it.....

...I cannot tell you when - - and don't you let anybody else try to tell you when!

...and I'm not so sure that I can tell you how the Second Coming is going to occur, even though I would consider myself a student of the Scriptures, and even though you may consider yourself a Bible lover, and read one page after another...

...these things are not ours to know, for Jesus himself has said that even the angels in Heaven do not know when it will take place. Yet Jesus was always talking about it! - - "It's going to happen!

God still has something yet to occur!"

If you and I don't know much about, why, then, was it a theme repeated by our Lord? Why was it something that He doesn't want us ever to forget, if only to tell us that He will re-appear? And why is it that the Christian Church has seen fit to write it into its Creed - -

" - - and He will come again - - to judge the living and the dead - - " ?

And furthermore, difficult as it may seem, I have to admit that there is something like a contradiction. Jesus is talking about the Kingdom that's yet to be established, and yet while He was here on earth He was always telling people that the Kingdom was already here! One day there was that forerunner of His, John the Baptist, who went up and down Judaea saying, "Get ready! Get ready! Get ready! There's One coming, now, who is going to establish the Kingdom, and it's going to happen in your life-time." .....why, then, do you go talking about something that you say is here, and yet you say it's yet to come?

It's not a contradiction. It is a statement of fact.....because God deals with Eternity, and Eternity includes everything - - the past, the present and the future. It is we who make the divisions. God deals with an eternal NOW.

That shouldn't be too hard to understand.

Let's take the present moment now that claims us, the very present moment. Honestly now, you can't divorce it from the past. I who stand at this sacred desk, treating this particular text which is the basis for this sermon, find myself going back thirty and more years, as a teenager who crossed Broad Street, climbed the stairs to a second-floor sanctuary, and worshipped with a bunch of youngsters in a Methodist church.....the present moment that claims you can never be divorced from the past. A man is part of all the places that he has ever visited, a man is also a part of everything that's ever occurred to him.

When we were youngsters and went away to camp we were always impressed by the time that we spent around the campfire. I remember once at Nawakwa when we had our first council fire, some kind soul, given to inspiration, said to us, "Watch the embers now. You'll see the terrible black of a thunder cloud, you'll see the pinks and the violets of dawn, you'll see the gold of a setting sun..... you might even get some trace of a faint green, as spring begins to come, showing its sign upon the bud and the emerging leaf - - - these logs now being consumed in this fire reflect all the forces of nature to which they have been exposed in their life-time!"

...even nature gives the truth parabolically.....

A man is a part of all that has ever occurred to him, the present moment cannot be divorced from the past.

And for those who take life seriously, the present moment always has a kind of attachment to everything that's yet to occur.....this present moment I live

now even in the prospect of the things that are to follow immediately, the things yet to occur...

...even now, I'm thinking of the 11:00 o'clock hour of worship

...even now I can be thinking, as I share this worship service

with you, of the "Witness in Daily Life" group...

...the Plain Service of the Holy Communion...

...my relationship to you in the proclamation of this truth even has something of the overtone of when this sermon will be preached again, in substance at least, to another congregation.

This present moment in your own life, right now, can be overshadowed by other things yet to occur in the course of this day. You cannot divorce yourself from things yet to come - - - and that's what God's always reminding us! God's always saying - - "There's more yet to come!

- keep it in mind! - - don't forget it!"

That's why for the Christian life can ever be a thrilling thing. There is this element of expectancy. The Christian is grateful for the past, he's mindful of the present, he should be constantly hopeful as he anticipates the future. And it is what lies ahead that determines the basic character of his daily living. They tell me that when an artist wants to paint a landscape, before he does anything else he paints the sky. And then from the way he has treated the sky he treats everything else that appears in his picture. You and I must think in terms of that dimension which is over and above us as we relate ourselves to each day's activity.

I keep reminding myself about the old man who loved college life, and when nature and the rules of the university decreed that he could no longer have his regular teaching schedule and he became a professor emeritus, he could never keep himself away from the college campus. And whenever the fall term would come



around he was always there, and he had a way of confronting the incoming students - - he'd take one at a time, he'd touch as many as he could - - and then this strange, this eccentric old college professor would say,

"What brings you here?"

And invariably the student, the freshman, quick to answer, "Why, to get an education, sir."

"And after you get your education?"

"To get married and to get a job, I presume."

The old man would keep pressing, "And after that?"

"To get as far up the ladder as I possibly can"

(that's contemporary youth for you!)

" - - to climb as far as fast as I can - - "

"And after that?" .. the old college professor kept pressing...

"To get myself established securely and well; and then I suppose

I'll grow old - - "

"And after that?"

There was only one answer, and the college student had to give it, "Well, maybe some day I'll die."

And then the grand old man said - - "And after that?"

He spoke wisely and well, you see, for no man has a right to take today and even think of tomorrow except he deals with it as a fact of Eternity! Where the Christian is concerned, in every tomorrow there will always be Jesus Christ.

Now all of this does something for us. For the Christian it gives him a positive view of history, we're moving toward some end, there is always a

tomorrow - - and God deals with that tomorrow...it's part of His scheme of things, it's part of His plan. That's why the Christian can face tomorrow, come wind or weather.

In these days of social upheaval, when we're not quite sure what the morrow is going to bring, but we know it's going to be there, we are in duty bound to reckon with the fact that God is involved in it. In late summer we had a delightful dinner party with our friends the Lindells who came from India, spent that wonderful week at camp with our youngsters, and you've heard David Lindell preach from this pulpit.....and then we had dinner together that day, and around the table we began talking about the issues confronting America, and the variety of species of social upheaval. And there were the voices being raised, without any restraint, pressing this point of view and that point of view - - whether we were moving too fast in certain areas where social/economic issues are involved.....

...and bless Lindell's soul, Lindell simply said, "Well, ultimately the only question that a Christian should concern himself with is this: is he acting in the direction of God, or isn't he?"

Maybe that's what Jesus Christ was trying to tell us when He was here on earth: the Son of man is going to return....

...history belongs to Him - - it's going to unfold,

generation after generation - - and you cannot rule

out the mind and the purpose of God.

I must tell you this....once our Lord Jesus Christ handed down a very serious indictment of a man. He called him a fool. He was a man who had arrived, as far as this world was concerned, he had established himself firmly

and securely, so he thought. He was a man to whom Jesus referred in this way -- he gathered together all of his possessions, he built great barns to house them all, he thought he had everything....

....and then Jesus Christ said, "He is a fool, because tonight his soul will be required of him -- then what about these things?" You see, with God there is always the fact of Eternity.

If my years have taught me anything, they've led me to believe that I should not be afraid of tomorrow, as long as I fervently believe in Jesus Christ and endeavor to order my life according to His good pleasure -- for in every tomorrow there will always be Jesus Christ, and the realization of that moment with Him will be even far more precious than what I know right now.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ANSWER, PLEASE"

( - - when a man questions God!)

The sermon bears the title, "Answer, Please" and the text is based upon the Gospel for the Day; it's the 3rd verse of the 11th chapter of Matthew:

" - - Art thou he that should come,  
or do we look for another?"

The question is the question of a man who was doomed: being imprisoned, he knew that his days were numbered.

You ought to know a little bit more about this man, for it's never just what a man says, it's never just a man asks, but you should also know where he is when he raises such a question - - what is his background, what is his situation when he says what he says?...for a man's circumstances and a man's condition can determine his attitude toward life.

The question is the question of John the Baptist. He was a man who gave his life to telling other people that Jesus Christ was going to come into the world, this was his dedication, and he fulfilled his commitment perfectly.

But now his career is ending in disaster. John, bless his soul, was a rough and ready kind of person, never given to speaking softly. He was the kind of man who hated evil, and at the very sight of evil he would blow up a storm...he was far from being the gracious kind of man that some people possessed by God are able to be - - but not so John the Baptist.

He was the kind of man who would never learn to live by the old adage, that "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day." Wilderness-bred that he was, he believed that the only day that a man really had was the present moment, and he believed that a man was in duty bound to seize the pres-

ent day and to make the most of it. If a truth had to be spoken, let it be spoken now -- there's no guarantee of a tomorrow.

When you have a man like this, you can almost predict his end, and always it's going to be disaster....

...it isn't a case whether he'll be murdered or not

...it isn't a case whether he'll be thrown into prison or not

...it isn't a case whether he'll be silenced or not

.....simply a case of how soon!

Well this is how it happened. Herod Antipas had gone off to Rome to visit his brother. Herod always had an eye for a woman, and while he was there visiting his brother he seduced his brother's wife...then he went back home. And when he got home he got rid of his own wife and took to live with him his brother's wife whom he had lured away. John the Baptist called this for what it was - - - "this is evil - - this is pure, unadulterated wickedness - -"

Now you just don't talk against an Eastern despot and walk away - - you become a marked man...and Herod in revenge had him thrown into prison, had him thrown into prison at Machairus(?) of all places, because there, down in his dungeon, as part of his punishment, John the Baptist could hear the revelry and picture the wickedness that was taking place in the palace above him.

It's never an easy thing for a man to be thrown into prison, particularly for a man like John the Baptist. He roamed the desert, he was a man of the wilderness, and this perhaps was the only time in his life when he was ever forced to have a roof over his head, to be surrounded by four walls. Now this is the man...condemned to die.....

...and incidentally, dying men cannot afford to doubt. Recognizing his fate, he sends his representatives off to Jesus Christ - - "Put to Him the

question - - bring me back an answer!" The question? - - "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another? Answer, please!"

In truth I tell you, every man is John the Baptist, John the Baptist is Everyman. For whether you're willing to admit it or not, whether you keep crowding it out of your mind, the basic fact remains: every single one of us is under sentence of death, eventually - - every man will die. There was a wise old monarch who charged one of his servants to come to him each morning, and this was his assignment: "Look me, look me straight in the eye and say, 'and thou too, O King, and thou, too, shall one day die'". Every one of us knows that this lies ahead, and because this is true, if we've any doubts in our minds concerning God we'd better try to get them settled now. For men under the mark of death cannot afford to doubt - - we need to know.

It's the nature of man to ask, then. When man begins to ask questions, if he has any spiritual sensitivity at all he has a way of throwing questions even into the face of God, and this, I say to you, is not necessarily bad. If you have an inquiring adolescent, if this youthful son or daughter of yours has yet to accept completely and perfectly what you no longer question, don't be unduly alarmed by this; as long as the questions are reverently raised you need have no fear. For after it's all said and done, it can be said that to ask is to learn, and there is so much that we do not know, there is so much that we ought to know.

For the moment, let us put it this way - - these questions that we ask, what do the questions reveal? Do they reveal your impatience - - - "God, why don't You do something?" I came face to face with a woman like that the year I went off to theological seminary. She had heard about what Hitler was doing as he marched into Poland, and then as though she felt we theologs, if we didn't



have the answers, at least we thought we had the answers, she said, "This God of ours - - why doesn't He do something?"....as though God would snap His finger, you see, and Adolph Hitler would be evaporated, and goodness and love would prevail throughout the world, just when God snaps His finger! ....these questions of ours, what do they reveal? - - our impatience - - "God, why don't You do something?"

....these questions of ours, do they reveal our ignorance - - "God, what are You like?" We who anticipate the birth of Jesus Christ can well afford to say to ourselves, that is why God came in Christ--- that any man, seeing Jesus Christ, would know exactly what God is like....and the fulfillment of that is expressed in the words of Christ Himself who said, "Who has seen Me has seen the Father".....you bring your questions, God has the answers.

....these questions that we ask, what do they reveal? - - our impatience - - our ignorance? .....could they reveal at once our helplessness and our hopefulness - - "God, are You the one to save me?" And who knows, I say to you, this is the ultimate question, you can bring no greater question to God; nothing more to the point can pass your mind, when you think of God, than this, "Will You save me?" Dying men cannot afford to doubt, they need to know. So we stand in the tradition of John the Baptist. We, too, raise these questions, "Are you really the one who is to come? - - or should we look for another?"

A person has a way of marking anniversaries, doesn't he, and anniversaries serve to bring back to remembrance. Throughout these days I'm remembering how last year at this time I was making ready for that trip to India - - the last-minute preparations had to be in order before the plane took off.....and there

was that mission, to go as a representative of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to a people who have always been religious - - less than 2% may be Christian, but all the rest of them believe in some kind of god! - - some of them have a kind of spiritual sensitivity that would put your sensitivity in Christ's name to shame! - -

...and I recall those days of personal preparation for this proclamation of the Gospel. Would I honestly go to them and say,

"Whatever your god, put him aside. He is unable to save. Jesus Christ alone is the Redeemer!

I have the answer for you!"

...I would never have made the trip if with all my soul I did not believe it.

For those of us now who keep putting the question: "Are You the one who is to come? - - are you God's last word?"....what is the answer? One has to be very frank with oneself. You remember the answer that Jesus gave - - go back and tell John the Baptist, not what I am telling you, but what you see me doing. Ah, there you have it! In the final analysis, the proclamation of God's truth can never stand by itself, it always needs demonstration. Jesus Christ did not say.....

"Listen to me, I'm going to preach you a sermon....

"Listen to me, I'm going to give you a basic course in theology....

"Listen to me, I'm going to give you a practical course in

Christian ethics.....

"Listen to me, I'm going to read you a page from the Bible.....

...and then you go back and tell John the Baptist exactly what I said - - "

But Jesus Christ did not talk like that.

He said, "You go back and tell John the Baptist what you saw me doing." And who

knows but what when they came back, at first blush this must have completely unsettled John the Baptist, for he could hear, up there in the palace rooms, the ludicrous laugh of the wicked king, and the insensible laughter of a lustful woman...

...and these people come back to John the Baptist and say,  
"Jesus said we should tell you what He was doing -- He was giving sight to a blind man....He was enabling a lame man to walk....He was giving back a deaf man his hearing.....He was cleansing lepers.....and then He was preaching the Gospel to the poor -- "  
...how do you suppose John the Baptist must have felt? --

"Spending your time doing this kind of thing, when wickedness reigns in high places! You want me to believe in a God that goes around loving people? Look at me! Look where I am! -- and all I did was to tell people that this kind of a God was going to come!"

More than one person has spoken as this man spoke...."Don't talk to me about the love of God. I lost ever so much through two world wars, I stood by while my wife, whom I dearly loved, wasted away into death painfully from her malignancy -- when no sedation whatsoever could ease the pain; and now, when I look round about the world of which I am part, some man somewhere perhaps could precipitate all Hell let loose on this earth, and all of us would be blown to bits.....don't talk to me about being kind to people.....and don't talk to me about a God who says this is the way." I have only heard men speak like that, I myself have not talked to God like that. But I remember, not long after the war, when in that parsonage in South Williamsport we had living with us time and again, the total number was eight or ten, displaced

people, and there was that bright, that energetic, that most promising student from Lithuania, Johannes Edwardis Gerdes Simaitis - - we called him Sim for short.....we stayed up until two or three o'clock in the morning, sometimes, talking about the Christian answer to all the hell that he saw let loose. Whenever I as a minister of the Gospel of Christ's redeeming grace would talk about God's love he seemed to bristle, he seemed to hedge.....all, you see, that he could remember was his father who was put to death in the concentration camp--a good and an honorable man....

....John, with the sentence of death upon him, who spoke out against evil - - and Jesus Christ sends back the word, "Tell him that I'm loving people, tell him that I'm doing nothing but good."

It may have taken John the Baptist a while, and then maybe it occurred to him who knows! - - John the Baptist must have said to himself, Well, I'll have to take Him at His word, and I'll have to quit focusing my eye upon the evil of men - - I'll have to think about the goodness of God! Because that's our God for us. God never allows man to have the last word. He who trafficks in evil will not stand forever - - only the goodness and the love of God remain.

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CHRIST'S FINGER POST" (John 1:23)  
(God's need of those who show the way)

There never was a man quite like John the Baptist. He remains forever in a class all by himself. Had you lived in his day, you would have all kinds of descriptives for this man, so unusual, so remarkable.

People were always trying to figure him out - - "What's his angle? - - Who is he? - - What's he up to?".....so much so, that one day the important people appointed a special delegation, and they charged them with the responsibility:

"Go to the man. Press the point - - ask him!

Don't come back unless you can give us a satisfying answer."

So off the delegation went. And one day when they encountered John the Baptist they put to him a number of different questions, because you see, in the meantime, they, too, had tried to figure him out, and even when they came to confront him they had some notions as to who he might be, and they were very, very extravagant notions, to say the least. You can find them in the Gospel record for yourself....

...for when they came to John the Baptist they said,

"Tell us, are you the Messiah?"

...well, why not? Rumors were rampant. No matter where you would have gone in his day people were talking about the One who was to come, and no one had any fixed ideas as to what the Messiah might be like. This strange man - - who knows! - - this man could be the Messiah...

"John, tell us, do you consider yourself to be the Messiah?"

....and John answered candidly, frankly, "No."

"All right, then, we think maybe you might be Elijah!"

...with their knowledge of biblical history they were given to understand that before the Messiah came Elijah would come, and Elijah would do all kinds of things in preparation for the Messiah. He'd make decisions -- Elijah would say who would be the good people and who would be the bad people, who would be worthy to receive the Messiah and who would not be worthy to receive the Messiah, who would be the good Jews and who would be the bad Jews, who would be the chosen ones, who would be the rejected ones. And then, of course, Elijah would have the high and lofty privilege of anointing the Messiah....

"Tell us now, man from the wilderness, are you Elijah?"

...John the Baptist said "No."

Well the only thing left, then,

"Well, maybe you're The Prophet?"

....they knew of course that God would allow them many, many prophets, and so there had been a sprinkling of prophets over the generations; but then everybody said one day, one prophet above all prophets would come, it might be Isaiah come back to life, it might be Jeremiah come back to life, who knows!....and he would gather together all the teachings of all the other prophets, and before the Messiah would come The Prophet would loom on the horizon.....

"Tell us, we can't figure you out - - we've exposed you,

now, to our questions, our guesses - - are you, or aren't you?"

...and then John the Baptist said "No" again.

They kept pressing for the point,

"Well if you're not who we think you are, then who do you



think you are?"

And he answered, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."

No man has ever matured until he finds himself being able to give an answer to himself, "Who am I?" It's the question of questions, perhaps. What is your role in life? What have you been meant to accomplish? The mark of maturity is when a man can finally say, "To this end was I born, and it's to this purpose that I must give myself." John the Baptist was able to answer, "I am a man who serves as a finger post - - I am pointing in the direction of God."

Now you'll notice what's being done here.....the implication is being established clearly and deliberately: no man ever comes into the presence of God unassisted or unaided. It is absolutely impossible for any one of us ever to figure God out by himself. You can't do it. And in the final analysis, none of us ever really comes to God, it's impossible for any of us to go directly to God. We know God only as He comes to us.....we know God only as He makes Himself revealed to us. The boy who came home from Sunday School one day, after he had gone for the very first time - - he was about four years of age and for some reason or other he had not gone to Sunday School before, and his mother plied him with all kinds of questions - - "What was it like? - - who is your teacher? - - what did you do?" .....when all of a sudden the youngster turned and he said, "Mommy, what is God like?"

Well you see, what should have been done was already done, the purpose of the Sunday School was being fulfilled - - to introduce the child to the fact of God - - and the impression was so real that he wanted to pursue it...."Mommy, what is God like?"

Would I surprise you if I were to tell you, I who have been preaching the

Gospel of Jesus Christ for more than two decades - - I who can't remember when I never knew Him, He has always been part of my life....would I surprise you if I were to tell you that no one can really answer that question with complete satisfaction. No one can ever say fully, perfectly and completely, "This is what God is like" .....because the mind of God cannot be fathomed. Your mind, my mind, is too small. God is the Eternal One, God is the Great One....and you and I are finite creatures, God is infinite. And perhaps it's a very salutary thing to begin at that point and to say, well I don't know that any of us will ever be able to say fully, perfectly and completely, "This is exactly what God is like."

Man's been trying to do this in every generation, and the greatest of thinkers have wrestled with it. A long, long time ago that grand and good old saint by the name of Job posed for you the question, Can man by searching find out God? And even on the pages of the New Testament you can read for yourself these words, "No man has seen God at any time." The mind of man is entirely too small to be able to figure out perfectly and completely the basic nature and character of God. I don't know that I'd begin to answer a child like that, but I'm not talking to a child right now, I'm talking to you....and in the background of our own thinking there must be this admission, that none of us can ever fully, perfectly and completely fathom the mind of God.

Whenever you can completely figure anything out, you are greater than the thing that you're able to figure out. To all intents and purposes this can be said, when a student masters a subject, well you can allow the word master to have its full connotation. If you and I were able to master the mind of God, then we would be superior to God, we would be far greater! The mind of man is too small.

But this is not the last word. You may have to say that you cannot fully, perfectly and completely fathom the mind of God, but once you have been introduced to Jesus Christ you can say this: What is God like? - - Jesus Christ is like God! Can you make sense of the Christmas-tide, can you make sense of the Incarnation? Why is there a Jesus Christ?

...for the simple reason that you and I could never fully, perfectly and completely figure out the mind of God, so God says,

"I will do it for you....you cannot come to Me, so therefore

I will come to you. I will make myself known, I will give you the revelation."

In the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York the child who cannot communicate must be taught to communicate, and the successful teacher is the teacher who stoops to the level of the child, who, possessing all of her faculties, comes to the child where the child is, burdened with its condition, and in its precise circumstance, stoops to the level of the child and works from that point.

God knows there is a hunger on your part, God knows there's a hunger on my part to know what He is like....God knows with my limited capability I could never fully, perfectly, completely figure Him out for myself, so God in love comes to me, and God makes Himself known. This is the meaning of the Incarnation, this is the meaning of Christmas - - - God doing for me what I could never do for myself.....God coming to me.....God stooping to my level.....God, if you please, speaking my language, that I might understand, as much as I can possibly understand.

Now there are any number of things which God could do immediately and all by Himself. In fact, we might be hard-pressed to name anything that might fall

outside this category, granted it was according to His nature. But God ordinarily works at a slow and deliberate pace, and in doing so He uses people as His agents. Therefore I remind you what was said earlier: no man comes into the presence of God unaided, unassisted. We Lutherans remind ourselves, in the interpretation of the Creed, especially the Third Article of the Creed, that there's the Holy Spirit, God who comes to us, God who guides us, God who directs us, God who puts us in tune with Him. If this were not possible none of us would ever be able to understand, at least in a degree, the mind of God. He is over and beyond us, but whatever degree of understanding is going to take place, God says "I will help you, and I will have my agents."

I should not startle you when I tell you that in the plan of God there are some people, perchance, who have greater spiritual sensitivity. Wordsworth used to say it this way, "God has a few to whom He whispers in the ear." Not that He plays favorites, but there are those who have a degree of sensitivity that some of us will never know. They may be His chosen ones, and they themselves can never bring us directly into the presence of God, they can only point the way, the way of God's coming, the way of God's approach.

I tell you with complete frankness and with nothing but appreciation swelling up within my heart, I find the older I become that it's exceedingly difficult to think of God without thinking of certain people, people who served as finger posts, who pointed and said, "Look for God in this direction" ....who put their finger to their lips and hushed my soul, and said, "Listen - - He is coming - "

....my own mother

....the pastor who baptized me, confirmed me, stood  
with me at the time of my ordination...who first  
placed upon my heart the claim of Jesus Christ as  
the minister of the Gospel

....a seminary professor who followed me all the way  
through my impressionable years, who baptized our  
two sons, and who, if you please, I still believe  
from Heaven above remembers me in his prayers,  
that I might keep my soul sensitive to God's nearness.

John the Baptist, bless his soul, was able to say, "I knew exactly who  
I am - - - I am here in this world to point my finger in the direction of God's  
appearing. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that you could never have  
a nobler thought of yourself than to be able to say....

"I'm a finger post, saying, 'Look - - God's coming! - this way.'"

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CHRISTIANITY'S FINAL ARGUMENT" (John 21:24)  
( - the testimony of experience is irrefutable)

It is reasonably safe to assume that no matter what the characteristic of your own personality may be, you would have instinctively liked him...he was the kind of man who would have drawn you toward him, the kind of man that you trust as soon as you see him - - the kind of man that you say to yourself, he must be a very good person. He happened to live to a ripe old age; in fact, he was getting so old that there were people who spread the rumor abroad that he wasn't going to die until Jesus Christ returned. I think he must have been the disciple of all of them who had the kindest face. His name was John.

Now just because he was old, don't shy away from him. Maybe in our day and age we place too high a premium upon youth. There's something to be said for maturity, there is something to be said for gray hairs, there is something to be said for people who have lived a little bit longer than other people. It was a wise man indeed who said - - even though he wasn't too old, he did have wisdom beyond his years when he said, to someone who was growing older - - "Don't be ashamed of your years - - remember, not everyone gets the privilege of growing old."

John had the privilege of growing old. And yet I say to you, when a man becomes older, he also runs the risk of contrast and comparison. There are other people who died before their time, and so they have a way of contrasting and comparing the old man with other people who are no longer present....as though we have a right to expect more from older people, as though we have a right to expect more from people who live a little bit longer. After all, if



age does anything, age ought to teach; and there is such a thing that's indispensable called experience, and the older a man becomes the more experience he ought to have. And occasionally there are those who compare and contrast old men with men who have lived and men who have died. Maybe John ran that risk....

...what about those other men, Peter as an example, Paul as well? John now was an old man, Peter was dead - - so was Paul. How did he stand in comparison or contrast to them?

Paul was the man who went around from community to community establishing mission congregations. He was also the man with the great mind, because he left behind him a great system of theology.... John might have said as he sat there in his loneliness, in the loneliness of years, "They're right when they said I didn't make as great a contribution as that man Paul - - I have no string of churches to my credit - - I have no system of theology that's going to bear my name - - "

And then he might have thought about this man Peter. Peter, the energetic one, Peter the dynamic preacher, who could hold people spellbound in the hollow of his hand as he took words and made them march into men's hearts as well as into their minds.... Peter, who was not only gifted with a good mouth, an eloquent tongue, but also with a pastor's heart. He was the Big Fisherman become Bishop. And John in comparison and contrast might have said, "I've grown old....where are the people who call me the Pastor, the Bishop of their souls? - - where are they that can say that when they heard me preach that I ushered them into the very Presence of God? - - "

....there is this risk with an old man, as though just because one has lived longer, he should have done more, because he had the gift of the years.

Well I stand by what I told you at the very beginning. Chances are he had the kindest face of all the disciples, chances are he was the most warm-souled of any man who would ever come to know Jesus Christ. And he was the one who took to his grave that precious thing, that when men thought about him they said, he was the one, the one disciple whom Jesus loved, for even on that night of betrayal, it was John who sat nearest to Jesus and put his head upon His shoulder.

I come to you this morning to talk to you about John, on this day in the calendar of the Church known as John the Apostle, the Evangelist Day. You would have liked him very, very much. You would have liked him, above all else, for this reason: he was a man who never doubted the fact of God.

Not everyone can say that. I recall in my own years in college, the ups and the downs...always that hunger for a greater revelation, always that searching for a more secure moment -- not that I didn't believe Him, but I wished I could have been a bit more certain than I was. Mark you, John was the kind of man who could live out his years and always be able to say, to anyone at any time, under any condition -- "I know"

..."I am certain"

..."I believe"

...and mark you, when the Gospel comes to a close that bears his name, it ends with these words, "For we know that his testimony is certain, we know that his testimony is true."

This, by the way, is a characteristic that ought to become all Christians. When J. B. Phillips was translating the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, he tells us himself that he was tremendously impressed with the fact that when he went back reading word after word, page after page in New Testament history,

that he was impressed with the certainly by which these early Christians lived. It was not easy to be certain of God in New Testament days, because almost every Christian had a price on his head. You never knew just when you were going to be dragged through the streets, you just never knew when the Emperor would issue the order that you would be tossed before the lions, to make a public spectacle of you. It was not an easy thing to be a Christian in those days.

And yet, when you read the Acts of the Apostles, you are impressed with the fact that everyone who was a Christian was certain of God, and he lived his hours, he lived his seconds in the knowledge of God's existence and God's goodness. It's not at all unusual to read in the pages of the New Testament the word know.....

"For we know that all things work together for good to them  
who love the Lord - - "

"I know in whom I believe, and am persuaded that He is able  
to keep that which I commit unto Him against that day - - "  
...always the early Christian was able to say "I know."

That's why, you see, it was quite impossible to argue with them. Maybe one reason was this: that they didn't accept Jesus Christ for themselves because they met somebody who outwitted them in an argument. Who was the disciple who was able to say, "I believe in Jesus Christ because you've gotten the best of me in the argument - - you've convinced me, now, by the sheer skill of argumentation!"? These early saints were not given to argumentation, primarily because they themselves had not found God at the end of an argument.

Worshipping here in this place right now are those whom we consider the most precious assets in Saint Luke Church, our young people, to whom God most certainly has given tomorrow. Some of these young people went off to college last fall. Some of them had the very foundations of their faith shaken. They

have been introduced, they have been confronted by professors with very clever minds, gifted in the skill of argumentation, teachers who know a measure of delight in ridiculing some of the things you and I cherish, by which we live. I have not come to this sacred desk this morning to give them ammunition by which they can go back to the teacher and argue. I have never looked upon the sacred trust which is mine as a preacher of the Gospel to list one argument after another for belief in God. I hope that you can never recall a time when I came here in an arguing mood - - you just don't find God at the end of an argument.

But I have come to this sacred desk again and again, as I hope I will always come to it, to give you a recital of an experience, that you may know that this one man, at least, knows in his heart the fact of God. Some of these teachers are far more clever than all of us put together - - I wouldn't think of trying to match wits with them. They could beat all of us together in the argument. That's one reason why saints aren't given to arguing - - because there isn't a single one of them who ever was convinced of the fact of God just because of an argument.

But they did have something that was called irrefutable - - these saints had what you call an experience. They had had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, and they had come to believe in and to accept Him - - to trust Him, come wind or weather - - to believe!....and to believe completely. Paul....John ....Peter - - name them and others, and each one leaves us silent with his eloquent, "But I know.....but I know."

What am I talking about? I'm talking about spiritual sensitivity, that's what I'm talking about. What am I talking about? - - I'm talking about a kind

of an awareness. What am I talking about? I'm talking about response to a revelation.....hush, I pray you, the fact of God remains.

You have a perfect right to ask me, however, "But, Pastor, how does this happen? - - how can I become certain? - - how can I know in my heart what I believe you know in your heart?"....I should be honored indeed if you'd talk to me like that!

How does this happen? It has never been unusual to use the analogy of love alongside of theology and alongside of religion. You can never argue a person into falling in love with somebody else; and in fact if I were you, fair lady, and I knew that somewhere there was somebody who thought he might claim my heart some day, and he did that simply by taking a list of traits and characteristics, and then he tried to convince himself, by using a chart, that you were the one.....I'm not so sure that I'd recommend that you respond to him. When a man knows the experience of love, it's heart calling out to heart, it's the response of one soul to another.....and when it happens to you, you can only say to somebody else, "Well you can't know what I'm talking about until it happens to you."

Is it strange that I should talk to you about this kind of certainty with God? What is the most wonderful descriptive that we've ever had for God? - -

"God is love" ....and this certainty occurs always when

there are those of us who respond to this love which

God gives to us.

The thing that frightens me more than anything else of our contemporary age is the fact that we are so foolishly intellectual...that we don't much respect anything, unless it can be respected intellectually. I'm not forgetting the fact that God in Christ said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy



heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind - " - - - God wants us to use our brains.

But God is more than Supreme Intellect. The simplest possible way by which to deal with this could be in this manner: can you intellectualize your mother's love? - - can you argue yourself into believing that your parents are good? - - will you refuse to trust them in their wisdom until you've run the gamut of one disciplined argument after another? That wise old man, that kind old man, simply said, "I know."

Bishop Steven Neal used to go around India and preach. Like as not he'd find his congregation on the streets, and then he'd gather them around him, and they'd sit down on the ground, in concentric circles. The ones who were baptized and confirmed were closer to the preacher; and then as we found it to be true in India last winter, always you would attract the non-Christian - - eager to hear what's going on...."What's this man saying?"

....and Bishop Neal would say here were these people who had come now, who were not converts to the Christian faith, but they were all ears and they were very attentive...and Bishop Neal said, "It occurred to me then, on one occasion, that while I was preaching, everything that I was saying was being validated, or being made invalid, by the people immediately in front of me, who claimed the name of Christ, and in the final analysis, Exhibit A would always be not what I was saying, but whether or not these people in front of me could be understood as believers, who could give assent - - who could say, 'Yes, Preacher, we know - - we know.'"

In the plan of God you may live out your years, and then it will come to you, as it comes to every man, to die; and in the moment of death there will be the confrontation with your Saviour.....and in that moment a man can't



afford to doubt.....

he either knows that Christ is his Saviour,

or he doesn't.

I pray for you a greater measure of certainty. It could be your most important single asset.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

COPY

O CHRIST OF GOD, who dost find our hearts a dwelling place, we give Thee hearty thanks for the joy that we know in being claimed by Thy love. We become increasingly grateful for the fact that as Thou dost lead us, so we grow in grace and beauty of soul and strength of character.

We thank Thee for those who have influenced our lives for good, who by the very character and integrity of their life convince us that Thou art worth following, worth obeying. We are grateful for the saints who from their heights shout to us, it is worth it, do not despair.

O GOD, for these troublesome days of ours, when the demands of life come with so great impact, enable us to believe, and to walk in faith. Now ere we leave this place, wilt Thou hear our prayers for those whom we love, those for whom we have special concern, those, perhaps, who may lead upon us heavily. We would not fail them nor Thee.

OUR FATHER, we pray for the sick, the lonely, the discouraged and the dejected; and we likewise pray for anyone who thinks that he can walk at so great distance from You, who can fend for himself, who doesn't so much as give God a second thought. Heavenly Father, may nothing in us encourage him to continue in this way, but rather, may we inspire him to think in terms of One who alone is his Saviour.

FORGIVE each of us his sin now, and keep before us the hope of Heaven.

OUR FATHER.....